

# **THE MAKING OF A GENIUS**

**by**

**AARON STERN**

**RENAISSANCE PUBLISHERS**

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Library of Congress Card Catalog Number 70-181866

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655 Madison Avenue, New York 21, N. Y.

Vol. 7, No. 2, February 1957 Issue  
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**RENAISSANCE PUBLISHERS**  
North Miami Beach, Fla.

*Printed in the United States of America*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I am grateful to my spouse for her patience in coping with me during the long period of writing this book and for her valuable suggestions pertaining to the contents.

My thanks go to my many friends and colleagues for their critical appraisal.

A profound gratitude I owe to my good friend, Dr. John M. Flynn, Associate Professor at Nova University in Fort Lauderdale, for his wholehearted support and endorsement of my proposed experimental school based on the total educational submersion theory, for his kindness encouragement and expert literary advice rendered in editing of *The Making of a Genius*, as well as his penetrating foreword to this book.

Above all, I am deeply obliged to Dr. Benjamin Fine, the distinguished author and scholar for his warm and eloquent remarks.

Many thanks to Magazine Management Co. Inc., Marvel Comics Group, for permission to reprint "Aaron Stern's Impossible Escape," which appeared in February, 1957 issue of Male Magazine.

"Intellectual growth  
should commence  
at birth and cease  
at death only."

Albert Einstein

To Edith whose remarkable scholastic attainments signify a revolution in education.



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## **FOREWORD**

*The Making of a Genius* is a book about education, struggle, and life. It is an inspiring and dramatic story of a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Europe and his stark determination to mold his children into what he has called "superior human beings" using his "total educational submersion" approach to education. But in many ways, it is more than just a story. It is also an indictment of the inequities and ills of American society, in particular of our educational system.

Aaron Stern has a commitment to honesty and justice and he has high standards of conduct and performance to which he would like to see the world adhere. For a man who has survived beatings at the hands of the Nazis, two years of living in a forest as an animal, cancer of the jaw, and a persistent heart condition, he displays a refreshing disbelief in the injustices of life. While he cannot be considered naive, he is as shocked by the corruption of people and their complacency about life as might be the proverbial farm boy visiting the big city for the first time.

As the title implies, Aaron Stern's daughter, Edith, was made into a genius, not only as demonstrated by her intelligence quotient, but also as repeatedly shown by her academic performance. Further, both of his children show an impressive ability to cope with life and to interact with other people without fear. How was this accomplished? By Stern's own efforts in which his children were totally submerged in educational experiences.

The entire world of Edith, and probably to a lesser extent of David, has been involved with learning and the acquisition of knowledge. These two children were born into an environment where such activities were as much a part of life as are eating and sleeping in most homes. Education was a normal way of life and they took to it just as any child is aculturated into the ways of the society of which he is a member. It is not unusual that Edith Stern progressed so far; it would have been more unusual if she had not.

What then was the basis of his method? Psychologists have found that the behavior of people can be shaped and strengthened by the careful use of praise and rewards. When the person is well motivated, merely telling him how well he is doing will suffice. Stern seemed to be quite proficient in such methods, making extensive use of spontaneous expressions of love and affection following good performances by the children. Also he would frequently buy them ice cream cones or some other small items as a reward. Occasionally, he would require them to complete a learning task before they could do something which they wanted to do. This is another kind of reward. Even when there was no praise or reward given, he would frequently tell them how well they were doing. This is applied psychology at its best, and he was a master at it.

Other aspects of his method are also important. By working with one child at a time, he was able to achieve the optimal in individualized instruction, a one-to-one relationship. His methods have also illustrated that the tools of education can be austere and Spartan. He used the materials at hand and the materials that a poor man could afford such as old travel posters, an abacus, and most often, the world itself.

It is also important to mention the content of the Stern children's education. They of course, learned the basics of reading and arithmetic, both being able to read before the age of two. Once they learned to read, there was no limit, for reading became the key to the wisdom of mankind. The curriculum was not pre-determined. If it seemed apropos to delve into history, or biology, or religion, that is the direction their learning went. Stern's objectives were the global, amorphous kind which permitted the children to go where their interests took them.

Aaron Stern strove hard to instill into his children commitments to social justice and the brotherhood of man. He taught them that religion is serving God by helping mankind, that war is never just, that all races and creeds are equals, and especially that women are equal to men. He opposed the Vietnam war long before it became fashionable to do so. It would be easy to describe him as a liberal, but that term is too often misunderstood. Rather, he is a humanitarian and a seeker of justice, and if his educational methods have all bordered on being indoctrination, it is in this realm that they have.

He also taught his children that at the root of all education, there must be ethics and morality as patterned after the teachings and examples of gentle men such as Gandhi, who devoted his

life to his countrymen. Stern argues that a mathematician, such as Edith, cannot be a good mathematician unless she or he is also an ethical person. This is the problem that gripped the atomic scientists whose work contributed to the Bomb.

Parents wishing to duplicate Stern's work with their own children should keep in mind that because he was frequently ill and unable to be employed, he had a tremendous amount of time on his hands which he could devote to his children. Most of us do not have such large amounts of time and even if we did it is unlikely that we would be willing to devote it to our children. However, even the partial implementation of his methods would be very beneficial to the intellectual growth of most children.

On the other hand, it is pathetic that parents, if they want their children to achieve full potential and to be well educated, have to resort to educating their children in lieu of the schools doing the job. The purpose of the schools, and the justification for their existence, is to educate the children, and if they were succeeding, no one would have educate his own children.

There is yet another aspect to this story. Not only did Aaron Stern give his daughter and son educations superior to that which the schools provided, but when he tried to interest the professional educators in his methods, they sneered. He had asked for a chance to demonstrate his approach to education at the local, state, and federal levels, not with bright, middle class children, but with impoverished, underprivileged ones. No one would give him that opportunity. This is a tragic commentary on those who teach our young, particularly since American education is badly in need of help.

This is a book which should be read by all Americans—parents, teachers, taxpayers, and even the children toward whom education is directed. America and the rest of the world must pin its hopes for the future on quality education, for education is the closest to a panacea for the world's problems as we will probably ever attain. *The Making of a Genius* is a vivid portrayal of the power and potential of education. It shows dramatically that man need not be mired in the mud of mediocrity. Given the right opportunities and experiences, his mind can be unleashed to attain great heights of intellectuality. This book should be an important contribution to the national debate on education.

John M. Flynn  
Ed. D.  
October 1971





# CHAPTER 1

## *The Impossible Escape*

I lay there in the hole. It was a dank, frozen hole, clawed out of the black, unyielding earth by my desperate hands, and it stunk of my filth. I twisted on the mess of rags that crawled with lice and I looked up at the thatched fir boughs that served as a roof. I was dying of starvation.

The desire to live is an amazing thing. So many times I had been close to death; so many times I had wished that death would claim me; and so many times I had died in my own mind.

But now I didn't want to die. I would fight until the end. I rolled over and pushed myself up on one elbow. I felt the strain in the quickened beat of my heart. I also felt the pounding throb. The infection had made a hideous blue and bulging thing of my leg and the fever burned.

In my delirium I had thought of seizing my knife and ripping the sickened leg to the bone. And I had seen myself elated because of this violent victory over torment.

That was it: victory; to win over something. For years there had been nothing but defeat. There had been nothing except running away, always being hunted, trusting no one, suspecting everyone, being surrounded by the enemy.

More than ever then, as I crawled for the snowed-in opening to the hole, was I aware of the enemies that stalked the forest. There were the wild dogs who would rip you to pieces in a matter of seconds. There were the fiery-eyed wolves who preyed at night. There were the cunning, cruel men of the Gestapo, the local spies who would sell a man's life for a pound of sugar, and the outlaws who would cut a throat for a pair of shoes.

I thought of all these as I pulled into the snow. I steadied myself with my staff and tightened the tattered overcoat around me as the wind bit into my flesh. I took the first step and the pain of the infected leg shot through my whole body. Slowly I pushed ahead, my cloth-wrapped feet leaving a wide crease across the white surface. I heard neither the whine of the wind nor the far-off cry of the hungry wolves.

I was possessed with but one thought—to get out of the forest. For two, long, frightful years it had been my sanctuary—and it had also been my prison. Now I could stand it no longer. If I stayed another day I would either die or go mad. Even a Nazi bullet would be better . . .

It was in January of 1943 that I had entered the forest about 100 miles northeast of Warsaw. Like other thousands I was fleeing the Germans. You fled or faced a slave-labor camp or a crematory.

My only possessions had been the clothes on my back. I had no food, no weapons. It was bitter cold and the snow was two to three feet deep. Despite gnawing hunger, my first job had been to make a shelter. So with my hands and a piece of wood I started to dig. By nightfall I had a hole the length of my body and eight inches deep. I had made a crude blanket of strips of fir and when I tumbled into the hole exhausted, I pulled it over me.

I slept only a few hours. When I awoke it was dark and snow was falling. Trembling with the cold, I listened to the wild howls of the animals. Perhaps I would have been wiser to stay in Warsaw, getting a handful of food a day and waiting for the time when I would be herded onto a truck and taken to the ovens.

How many of my family and friends had I seen taken away to die? Days later, through the underground, we would hear what happened to them. Some would be lined up in the public square and shot, but before this they would be subjected to every form of torture and ridicule. Old people would be stripped of their clothes and herded through the streets naked. Those who didn't move fast enough would be clubbed, their arms and legs broken. The girls were publicly exposed to debasement. They prayed for the moment when a bullet would put a merciful end to their shame.

When I remembered all that, I was glad I was in the forest. The thoughts fired me with the overpowering resolution to survive.

The dawn of my second day was a raw, gray awakening. I crawled from the hole and began a search for wood. I had a box of

matches and heat now was more important than food. I soon had a small fire going. I spent the rest of the day digging the hole deeper and gathering wood for the fire. I meant to adjust myself to the forest and its way of life—and I would survive.

I learned to identify certain noises. I soon discovered that there were many other people in the forest and I learned how to douse the fire and crawl into the hole without leaving a trace when they approached.

Each day I learned more of my surroundings. About a mile from the hole I found a road used by the Germans to send fresh troops to the front. From a tree I watched troops come and go. When they had passed I would leave my perch and search the road for discarded bread and scraps of meat and even chocolate.

The greatest treasures I salvaged from the road were a pair of shoes and a knife eight inches long. With the knife I could do many things. I carved a crude cup from a piece of wood in which to melt snow over the fire and for the first time had something warm to drink.

During the long spells of hunger I was driven to frequent acts of desperation. One night, while a heavy snow fell, I crept past the Nazi sentries into a small village a few miles from the fringe of the forest. I made my way to the barnyard of what once had been a prosperous farm, and caught a plump chicken. Yet, with a fine dinner in prospect, weariness overcame me. I couldn't go any further. I had to sleep. I found the barn and climbed up into the hayloft, the chicken tucked under my coat. I stretched out and was asleep.

I was awakened by barking. When it stopped, I crawled to the barn door and peered out. It was still dark and the snow was still falling. Dashing around the side of the barn, I fled across a field. Finally I found the road and soon I was back in the welcome arms of the forest.

Shortly after this incident I found the frozen carcass of a horse on what appeared to be a seldom-used trail less than a half-mile from the hole. As I hacked away at the joints with my knife, I noticed that the animal had been recently shod. Who owned it, and why was it dead in the forest?

In the spring, I got the answer. Deep in the forest, farther than I had ever gone, thrived a large band of outlaws. While there were many guerrillas in the forest, too, they were dedicated to harrassing the Nazis and they worked at nothing else. The bandits were

another matter. They preyed on everyone, even doing business with the enemy through intermediaries. To be captured by them meant certain death. If you carried anything of value you would be stripped, then turned over to the Germans for a price.

I learned the hard way how cunning they were. It was a warm day in May. I had earlier enjoyed the luxury of washing out the pieces of rags that I used for clothing, sunning myself while they dried. Then I had gone berry hunting.

Suddenly I was surrounded by six men. They had come upon me without making a sound. I jumped like a frightened animal since I had not seen a human being for five months. They were cut throats if I had ever seen one.

"Hello, good friend," one of them said. "We are your neighbors; we also live in the woods. Why do you not join us? We have fine huts and there are good beds and always plenty of food."

Before I realized what I was doing, I had picked up my cup of berries and was walking along the trail with them.

Suddenly I realized how foolish I was. As we pushed deeper into the woods, step by step I lagged behind until all but one of them were walking in front of me. The one who stayed by my side was the one who had invited me to come along.

Without warning, at a turn on the trail, I made my getaway. For a moment he had me by the neck and then I struck. As he stumbled and fell, I darted into the underbrush. With every wile of the hunted coming to me like a second nature, I sped across the ground with scarcely a sound, leaping across rocks and fallen trees as though it was something I had done all my life. The cries of alarm grew fainter. My escape had been good. And then I realized that the horse I had found could only have been theirs.

From then on I doubled all caution. It was just as well. Late one summer evening, as I finished my dinner of boiled grass and berries, I heard an unfamiliar sound. It was heavy tramping—eight or ten men—less than 100 yards from the hole.

The sound told me just one thing: a Nazi patrol was not far off. I knew, as did the other inhabitants of the forest, that the Germans were afraid of the woods and the men in there, and stayed clear. So this meant that the patrol was lost.

Soon the sounds stopped. The patrol had decided to camp for the night. What they would do when daylight returned was anyone's guess. The best thing for me, I figured, was to stay in a tree

for the night, a feat at which I had become an expert, losing neither my balance nor a minute's sleep.

I had a favorite spruce not far from the hole and as I made for it I stumbled and fell in the dark. I had no sooner hit the ground than the calm of the forest was blasted with machine guns. For nearly five minutes bullets screamed over my prone body, missing me by inches.

It was hours before I moved again. Then, hoping it was safe, I crawled inch by inch deeper into the woods. When I was out of earshot of the Germans, I climbed a tree and went to sleep.

The summer and its small compensations of berries and grass soon gave way to the harsh blasts of another winter. When the first snow came I was a little better prepared than I had been a year earlier. I had found a coat discarded by a German soldier with which I covered the bottom of the hole. The hole too, was deeper—about four feet—and provided more shelter.

I had also learned the value of a long staff. It was a fine weapon both for hunting and staving off attacks by animals. But better than this was my knife. I had become a master at hurling it which saved my life more than once. The first time was during a raging storm near the end of December. As I huddled in the hole wondering when I would get a chance to forage for food, I heard the cries of a female wolf just outside. Like everything else in the forest, she was starved and desperate.

Slowly pushing back the thatch that covered the hole, I looked out—and there she was, about 15 feet away, eyes ablaze. When she saw me the howls of hunger became a hissing snarl. Her fangs were wet and bare.

I faced her, pulled the knife from my belt and sent it flashing to plunge deep into her chest just as she was about to spring. About an hour later I was eating roasted wolf meat. Five days later there was nothing left but the pelt.

One morning, while I was searching for fire wood—I had long since learned how to start a fire by striking two rocks together—I heard a low growl behind me. I turned just in time to see a giant bulldog coming for me. I ducked to one side as it leaped. While it flayed the air with its claws I sent my staff crashing across its back. It fell to the ground a writhing mass of fury. The animal's spine was crushed but it was still full of fight. Backing off a few feet, I threw my knife. It pierced the belly. A widening crimson

spread on the snow. The meat of the bulldog was the toughest I had ever eaten—but it was meat.

I survived the second winter in the forest without as much as a cold. But I was glad when the grass and the berries sprang up again. For one thing, signs on the trails and the roads to the villages indicated that the local farmers were moving more freely. Was it because the Germans were suffering setbacks at the front? Or was it because people had resigned themselves to the conquest? I had no way of knowing, but I soon found out.

One day, posing as a beggar, I approached a farmer driving a small horse-drawn wagon through the woods. I asked him if he had any food he could spare. He startled me with his friendliness. Sure, he said, he had some freshly-baked bread. Would I like some? He handed me a small loaf. While I wolfed it down he offered me a ride. I accepted. As we rode along he suggested that I return to the village with him. He could get me some clean clothes and if I liked, he told me, I could stay and work on his farm. I listened carefully to everything he said, and the more I heard the promises of good food and an easy job, the more suspicious I became.

Just as we were approaching the village I was sure I heard the sound of hoofbeats. His face indicated that he heard them, too, but he obviously was not concerned. This meant only one thing to me. Get out.

Striking him across the face, I jumped from the wagon. As I leaped he brought his horse whip crashing down across my shoulders. I made the edge of the woods just as a group of German soldiers rode into view.

I was not always to be so lucky.

One day in July, while watching the road from a treetop, a branch broke under me and I fell to the ground. I cut my right hand. I prevented any possible infection with applications of saliva and urine.

But while the wounds healed I was unable to use the hand and this brought on a deep feeling of depression. The depression became so bad, I decided to go to the village to ask refuge from the local priest.

It was late afternoon when I started out and it was nearly nightfall as I entered the village. I tried to give the impression I was a beggar, which wasn't too difficult. As I approached the church, I

was stopped by a patrol. Since I had no identification papers, I was hustled off to the local SS headquarters for questioning. When I saw the bright lights and the cruel faces all around me any feeling of resignation left me. The urge to fight came back.

I was ordered to a large room on the second floor where other prisoners were lined up with their pants down around their ankles. An SS officer went down the line. If the prisoner was found to be circumcised he was marched downstairs. No further questions were asked.

I was desperate. I told the guard I had to go to the bathroom. He motioned to a door at the end of the hall and gave me a push. To my amazement I found there was no one else in the toilet—and that there was an open window. In panic I squeezed through the window, dropped to the ground two flights below, then ran into the darkness. There wasn't even a shot fired.

Three hours later I was back in the foul security of the hole. Most of the men who had been in the large room with me were by now dead.

This experience was enough to hold me in check until the cold weather came. And then I felt the urge to move. I was just regaining the use of my hand when I decided to make another break out of the woods.

Again I made my way to the village, again I posed as a beggar, and again I wound up in the hands of the SS. In a matter of hours I was herded onto a cattle train. Destination: a crematorium.

While the train was traveling at its highest speed I made my leap for life, hurtling over the side, and rolling down the embankment. When I regained consciousness I was a mass of bloody bruises. I carry the marks until this day.

Hiding by day, crawling by night, I made my way back to the forest. I could go no place else. My leg was bad. Then the first blizzard of the winter came. I lay in the hole without food and raved to myself as the fever mounted. To prevent myself from going mad I recited poetry while I writhed in agony.

The mental depression now was worse. I relived all the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto. I remembered the night that my wife, Bella, and I had decided that we had to escape. We had crawled into the truck and had been carried outside the gates. I remembered jumping from the truck with Bella and hastily kissing her as she fled in one direction and I in another. What was she doing

now? Was she still alive? Was all this hunger and deprivation, all this misery worth it?

I had traveled the 100 miles to the woods posing as a beggar. Could I now escape from the woods by the same route? I got to my feet and stumbled from the hole through the ever mounting snow, my leg thumping in pain. I was saying farewell to the forest after nearly two years. It had been a good friend—and a bitter enemy.

Now it was 1944. The Germans were on the run—but I didn't know it. The allies were closing in and pushing back the oppressor.

I pushed on, stumbling, falling through the storm, blinded by the wind and snow, crazed by torment that raged in my leg. And then I found myself standing at the door of a farmhouse. The farmer, moved by my pleas and misery, said, "Come in, come in, out of the cold." My next feeling was that of hot soup coursing down my throat . . . and then of being hidden in a hole under the barn.

For the next few weeks the farmer and his wife helped me and with the hot water and towels they gave me, I bathed my leg and foot. The swelling went down—and I was able to use it again.

What followed I find hard to describe. It was so unreal. The dawn of freedom had come—the Nazis and everything they had represented had been defeated. The nightmare of horror was over.

When we fled from the ghetto, my wife and I had agreed to meet in Lodz if we survived the war. After spending weeks making my way across Poland by foot, I was sickened by the death, disease and ruin that greeted me there. Where would I look for her? Then as I stumbled through the rubble of the ghetto, the incredible happened. I found Bella. She had survived by a sheer miracle. Now, having remembered our agreement, she was there, living in a hovel of debris, waiting for me. I can't describe what it meant to see and hold her again.

Finally we made our way to a displaced persons camp in the American zone of Germany.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Birth of the Total Educational Submersion Method*

Bad Reichenhall, located at the feet of the majestic, snow covered Alps in southern Bavaria, commands a magnificent view. Surrounded by mountain streams, beautiful lakes and parks, the town abounds in luxurious villas of Europe's affluent visitors. Its colorfully attired inhabitants traditionally greet each other, "Grüss Gott." Hitler, intoxicated with the unparalleled beauty of the region, plotted his insidious strategy for world domination from his picturesque retreat at Berchtesgaden located ten miles to the south.

In 1946, the American occupation authorities, in cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), prepared abandoned army garrison buildings at Bad Reichenhall as a site for a large displaced persons' camp intended to be a haven for Jews escaping from the Soviet occupied areas of Europe, where having survived the Nazis, they were now being threatened by a growing anti-Semitism partly nourished by the puppet regimes. Even if the anti-Semitism subsided, there was justifiable fear that these Jews would be permanently isolated from world Jewry by the Iron Curtain. With the tacit approval of Eisenhower, many were aided in their escape by agents of the underground Jewish Army of Palestine, motivated not only by humanitarian reasons, but also politically since Palestine, to establish itself as an independent Jewish state, needed immediately a large influx of immigrants to increase its population, in the face of bitter Arab opposition.

Former concentration camp inmates, weak and resigned, risked

their lives to cross the borders of the Iron Curtain countries under fire. Other Jews, many old, sick, or wounded were smuggled in darkness through the rugged Carpathian mountains.

The daring and heroic exodus soon swelled to hundreds of thousands of people, including those, who, like myself, had hid in forests, those who had obtained non-Jewish documents, as well as those who had survived the concentration camps. The townspeople stared as trucks unloaded the strange conglomeration of people, some of whom arrived without shoes or shirts. Others wore uniforms which had enabled them to camouflage their identities so that they could safely reach the border. Women carried hungry and diseased babies in their arms. Often it was difficult to distinguish the sexes, particularly since many of the women wore rags and had not been able to grow their hair back since their liberation from the concentration camps.

A skeleton of UNRRA administrators had set up emergency services to handle the influx. Food was hastily served to these people, many of whom had not eaten in days. The food was dispensed in a central kitchen, and sometimes people had to wait hours in the cold weather to obtain warm rations. As the first wave of refugees was absorbed, the facilities, which had previously housed approximately 1500 soldiers, now had to house more than 6000 persons. Three or four families shared each room. One toilet facility on a floor had to serve the sanitary needs of fifty to sixty families.

In spite of the dedicated labor of social workers and the generous assistance of the U.S. occupation forces, the task of managing the camp was gigantic. People, who had been denied dignity for years, now wandered about, aimlessly and dazed. Unsupervised children roamed the streets. Tension grew among the camp inhabitants as a passion to get out of Germany became almost uncontrollable. Frustration grew into despair since the western countries were not eager to admit these refugees and the British administration in Palestine refused to let them go there, sealing off the access with a sea blockade.

As the people realized that what they had planned to be a brief stay in Germany might be indefinitely prolonged, measures had to be taken to prevent total demoralization. A committee of the camp inhabitants was elected which assumed responsibility for law and order under the supervision of UNRRA. Representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, HIAS, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and other agencies offered their limited resources.

One day as I stood at the food line watching a few youngsters teasing a shabbily dressed old man, I decided that I would try to organize a small school. The children, running wild, were probably the most tragic casualties of the war. They possessed the majesty of a wild jungle, not as beasts, but as primitives, unconfined by the inhibitions of convention, waiting to have their attention aroused, their innate curiosity stimulated. They were excellent raw material for education, and with a school I was sure I could take them off the street and give them real interests and a purpose in life.

Soon afterwards, I appeared at a committee meeting and explained my ideas for the school. "All that I ask of you is a spacious, well-ventilated room and a supplementary food ration for the children."

"What are your credentials?" I told them I had gone to a university for a couple of years. Then they asked, "How can you conduct classes without textbooks and a curriculum?"

"I shall manage. Anyway, these children have nothing to lose." The committee gave its reluctant consent, and the first of several refugee schools was founded at Bad Reichenhall. Soon I began recruiting my student body. I explained to the parents that I wanted the children for the entire day and that they would be fed at school. As I expected, the parents had no objections since the children had nothing to do in the crowded quarters anyway.

Before long I had thirty youngsters. There were clowns and thieves, exhibitionists and introverts. These were children tormented by tragic memories, often desperately searching for love and affection, and seemingly hungry for guidance and motivation. There was eleven-year-old Joseph from Poland who had been hidden by nuns in a monastery, eight-year-old Sacha who had scouted for the guerrillas in the Ukraine, ten-year-old David who had never known his parents and had been found begging in the streets of Prague, six-year-old beautiful blue-eyed Marysia who had lost a leg when she stepped on a grenade, and the shy, melancholic six-year-old Bela from Hungary. These were children in their formative years, yet adult in their ability to survive. I was awed by them, probably the most unique and heterogeneous group ever assembled in one classroom. They were not even united by a common language.

I realized that these children needed motivation and purpose, and identification with one another. Having taken stock of the political realities, I decided to teach them Hebrew in order to

help them develop a sense of pride in being Jewish. Further, I wanted them to develop an attachment and a longing for their historical homeland, Palestine. My objectives were much more than the three R's.

Before the first class, I hung posters on the walls depicting Palestine and acts of Nazi atrocities. A makeshift blackboard was erected and small benches filled the room. I also obtained a phonograph and a pile of records. When the children filed in for the first time some stared with amazement at the phonograph. I did not demand conformity nor regimentation, but allowed the children to move about curiously.

Soon they began to form groups according to the language they spoke; Polish, Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Yiddish, Croatian, Ukrainian and Rumanian. Only a few were bilingual. Usually the second language was Yiddish.

I sat at my table and observed the children's reactions. Soon some of them shyly approached me and began to talk about the posters. As they did, I would gently hug or kiss them, perhaps showing some of them the first affection which they had ever received. At noon as soon as food was brought into the room, they devoured it almost instantly. After lunch, I played Hebrew records. Those records which seemed to make the greatest impression on them I played over and over again. There was some rhythmic clapping and for the first time I noticed a smile here and there. "Havenu Shalom Aleichem" made the greatest impact so I made a mental note to employ it effectively at a later time. It was dark before I dismissed the class. Many of the children ran over to touch me or to shake my hands as they were noisily leaving the room.

The next day when I entered the class, I was pleased to find that many of the children were there before me. "Shalom iladim," I said as I entered.

"Shalom Aaron," they replied, nearly in unison.

"From now on," I said in Yiddish since more of them understood Yiddish than any other language, "We shall speak only Hebrew." Then I repeated the statement in five other languages. They nodded.

That afternoon we went on a field trip. The whole group counted the steps in Hebrew from one to ten as we walked along, simultaneously learning Hebrew and discovering numbers. We rested for a while in a meadow at the foot of the mountain. I

reached for a flower and said in Hebrew, "beautiful flower." The children all repeated it. Then we sang "Shalom Aleichem." Afterwards we played Simon Says in Hebrew. "Hands up, hands to the face," I commanded in Hebrew as I moved my hands accordingly. "Hands touching the knees," and then the ears, nose, forehead and eyes. Tired and happy, we returned to the tune of "Shalom Aleichem" alternated with counting the steps in Hebrew. By the end of the second day, the children had learned about 150 Hebrew words, some had learned more.

At the food line that evening, I met a committee member who had been a high school teacher. He asked me, "What kind of a wild experiment are you carrying on? Instead of teaching, you take them on trips. Discipline is what they need most." My battle with the educational world had begun.

The school continued to be mobile; the field trips presented ideal opportunities for the children to learn Hebrew. We visited the camp dispensary, the kitchen, the police station, the repair shop, and construction sites. Within two weeks I realized I had met my first objective—the children actually spoke Hebrew. This fact was brought home to me by a refugee from Poland. "I am losing my ability to talk with my daughter," she complained. "She wants me to speak Hebrew, too."

"Then learn it, damnit," I angrily replied. "Surely you will not return to Poland to be slaughtered by anti-Semites. Your future is in Palestine."

The school continued to operate and the children to progress. There were no underachievers or troublemakers. All that these children needed was affection and motivation for learning, namely learning that immediately appealed to them and intellectual stimulation to fill the blankness of their minds. I did my best to give it to them. The school ran without pageantry, coercion or decorum. Dirty words were often uttered in several languages. These were uninhibited children free to express themselves, free to react in anger, and free to argue with me even to the point of insulting me. For example, a girl once said (in perfect Hebrew), "I wish you would drop dead, Aaron, on this very spot."

"But why, Miriam?"

"I had no lunch today."

"I am sorry I missed you. I shall make it up." I kissed her tenderly on the cheek and her face lit up. There was no envy or ill feeling expressed by the other children, for I had no

favorites. Not all of the children needed this form of affection, yet, they all knew I loved them and they responded freely.

My school was different from conventional ones in other ways. There were no tests, marks, guidance counselors, child psychologists, truant officers, nor PTA's—all those superfluous forms, individuals and institutions which take the fun out of learning. I received no salary nor did I seek one, because no money was available. I owed my services to the children, to their parents, and to my God. These were my children.

The children frequently disciplined each other when minor offenses occurred. For example, Boris broke a window in a farm house during a field trip. Hastily, an assembly was called together at the scene of the crime. "Why did you do it?" the other children demanded.

"I was angry. The Germans have killed so many Jews."

"You were wrong to do it," lectured Chana. "We don't know if this farmer had anything to do with the crimes. When we arrive in Eretz, Israel there will be Arab residents. Would you blame them all for the Jews who have been killed there?"

"I'm sorry," Boris said. "I won't do it again."

One day a girl asked me in class why her father climbed on her mother during the night while uttering horrible sounds. This was a legitimate question, and I answered it as such. We discussed clearly the process of reproduction and the sexual anatomy of men and women. While our discussion was in progress, Chava, aged seven, suddenly undressed herself and showed the class her body. I reacted impulsively and cried out, "Don't do it! Put your panties back on at once!" But the reaction of the other children was calm and mature. There was no giggling and no vulgar comments. Our lesson on reproduction was concluded by a visit to the camp hospital where the children studied medical drawings and then looked through the windows at the maternity ward.

The next day a girl of eleven candidly described how she had been sexually molested by an intoxicated border guard. The class listened attentively. I hoped that the experience would not affect her psychologically in the future. All that she had ever known was tragedy and this had been just one more painful episode.

Our school functioned seven days a week, eight to ten hours a day, and everyone had fun. The children gladly attended

Sabbath service and afterwards we took walks, sang songs, and dreamt and talked about the future. As their verbal skill and comprehension increased, I began to tell them of the drama and beauty of the Jewish history. The Bible with its poetic language inspired them deeply, particularly the battles in defense of freedom. The slavery in Egypt provided a meaningful parallel with the Nazi persecution. "I know who the contemporary Moses is," Chava cried. "It is Ben Gurion." The prophets with their eloquent and courageous messages told the children of social justice and moral values. The posters on the wall assumed more meaning as the historical sites were identified. The records, enriched by a shipment from Palestine, served various purposes. They enhanced the appreciation of music, but even more they brought Israel to the children. Some of the records were sad, while others conveyed the vigor of the reborn nation. Still others brought to the camp the militant spirit of the liberation army. The records helped the young students to identify with the struggling young nation—their nation.

Our school still lacked the resources of other schools and so we continued to make the best of what was available. The field trips provided excellent sources of information. For example, we visited the railroad station and the electric generating plant where the children obtained first hand information about physics. Trips to the countryside provided a fine textbook for the study of ecology. They learned of the geography and topography of Palestine from a poster map. We followed current events, discussing them daily. Personal hygiene and sanitation was a critical problem for the camp inhabitants and so we spent a lot of time discussing it. The Americans in the town helped the children to acquire some English and most of the children learned German.

Although I worked with the total group on field trips and discussions, I never lectured to the students. Rather I offered individual attention to every student in the form of dialogue which could reach him on his own level. Thus, the age differences among the children did not create any particular problems. The rapport between myself and the children as well as among the children, was excellent. The older children assisted the younger ones, often carrying them on their shoulders during the frequent field trips. The class formed its identity as a group.

Although the lack of adequate learning materials by the standards of most schools might be perceived as a handicap, I do not

think that it was. Similarly, I do not think that the crowded poverty-stricken conditions of camp living were a handicap. Occasionally, some of the families secured better housing outside of the camp and the children left my class. After they left, they gradually lost interest in school and studying. I concluded, therefore, that Spartan conditions make for growth and development and that comfort and affluence retard the zeal for learning. These conclusions were my guiding light in the work with my own children several years later.

I had avoided teaching the children in the school how to read and write, yet they learned other subjects well without the mastery of reading. I had put off this task because there was a lack of books and because teaching the intricacies of the Hebrew alphabet frightened me. However, eventually I had to face the chore. One day I came to school early and wrote the Hebrew alphabet on the board. When the children arrived, they found pencils and tablets on the tables. I told them that we were going to learn how to read and write. Then I slowly and clearly read, "Aleph, Beth, Daleth." The children soon joined me in unison and we adapted a melody to it which they enjoyed.

For the next few days, the children wrote the alphabet on the tablets. Before long all the children could identify the letters of the alphabet. Then I wrote simple words while I pronounced them: "Shabath, Shalom, Israel, Galil." I called volunteers to the board—all were thrilled to go—and had each one write a word that he then memorized. Within four weeks every child could write the alphabet.

My next target was numbers and arithmetic. This was a much easier task than the alphabet since the children already knew the digits from seeing them on buildings. I divided the class into two groups; the children up to eight learned how to count and add and the older children learned simple multiplication. They practiced two and three digit multiplications while on the field trips and I was surprised at how good they were at it without pencils and paper. Fractions were also learned on our field trips where, with a pocket knife, we would carve out squares and divide them. Thus, like the ancient mathematicians, I taught geometry in the sand.

I was delighted by the success of the school. In a matter of three months, the children had not only learned Hebrew but they had adopted it as their mother tongue. They had been transformed from wild animals, beset by fears, to emotionally

mature children. They were well advanced in the social and the natural sciences. They could read and write, and had learned arithmetic. Further, in light of my original objectives, they were proud of their heritage and they were dedicated to the Zionist aspirations for the relocation of the Jewish people to their homeland. All this was accomplished without threats, bribes or punishment so common in the public schools.

Intoxicated with my success, I obtained some tests from a German public school principal by which to assess the level at which my children were performing. The tests had been published by the German Ministry of Education and I spent three nights translating the science and mathematics questions into Hebrew. The history and language questions dealt with Germany and so they were irrelevant for these children. Therefore, I designed my own questions for these areas of their learning. Then I tested them. The outcome was fantastic; the children in my school matched and at times excelled slightly their German counterparts who had attended school for three to six years. Thus, my total educational submersion method had been born.

One day I visited an ailing friend near Frankfurt, and I was detained for another day by a cold. This was the first time I had been absent from the school. While I was away, a touring American congressional delegation, or perhaps it was an Anglo-American mixed commission, visited the camp to study the refugee problem. They conducted a hearing at which dozens of displaced persons appeared to state their preferences for immigration. Most of them wanted to go to Palestine. A delegation of youngsters asked to be heard. The chairman was surprised, but he granted them permission to speak. Then, as it was later reported to me, about fifteen youngsters ranging from eight to fifteen, entered the hall singing the Zionist anthem, "Hatikvah," in Hebrew. One by one they took the stand and identified themselves by biblical names, names which they had chosen for dramatic effect.

For example, one youngster took the stand and was asked, "What is your name?"

"Joseph."

"Age?"

"Nine," he replied in Hebrew.

"Where were you born?"

"In Haifa."

"Where would you like to go?"

"Home to Eretz, Israel."

Similar testimonies were given by each child. They left in formation singing, "Chava Nagila." As they had planned, their performance visibly touched the delegation.

When I returned to the camp, I was greeted by a committee member who exclaimed, "Aaron, that was a fine and effective Zionist presentation. Congratulations."

"What are you talking about," I asked since I had not yet heard about it.

"You actually had nothing to do with your children's presentation?"

"What presentation? Of course, I did not."

Although I have lost contact with these students of mine, I am confident that, notwithstanding their tragic background, they are capable of great devotion and heroism in defense of their Promised Land.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Darkness at Noon*

Bad Reicheahall was behind me now. It was late afternoon as the declining sun cast its long shadow upon the walls of my furnished room in the Bronx. I was lying on my bed remembering the nightmares of my past—the Nazi atrocities, the endless flight, the jump from a moving train, the last meeting with my parents before their extermination, the cruel beating at the hands of a bloodthirsty SS trooper, who threw me on the concrete and stomped on my face.

That was the past. Now I had to face the present. I had just been discharged from a hospital with a large hole where there once had been a lower jawbone. Several operations had been unsuccessful and the cancer resulting from beatings in the camp kept recurring. Two transplants caused osteomyelitis. There was virtually no hope for me as I was told by my attending physicians.

My wife, Bella, was the mainstay of my existence during these ordeals. Little had she known when she met me as a nursing student in pre-war Warsaw that she was destined to lead such a life of struggle with me. After surviving the war, she had worked as a head nurse in the displaced persons' camp hospital. There she had to cope with the endless physical and mental wounds which were destined never to heal.

On our arrival to our newly adopted homeland in 1949, Bella's high hopes for peace and tranquility had been shattered by my deadly disease—which soon encompassed a major portion of the medical dictionary. Yet in defiance of the gloomy diagnosis, she would assure doctors, "I know Aaron is too stubborn to die."

Undeterred by the long, almost endless chain of surgeries, she would faithfully stand at my bedside until past midnight, feeding me through a straw and cheering me. Then reluctantly in the wee hours of the morning, she would make her lonely subway trip to our home in a Bronx slum so she could get a few hours of rest before going to work early the next morning.

Once Bella told a neighbor how en route from the hospital a youngster had snatched her pocketbook containing \$50—the only money that she had. The next day, another handbag was presented to her by the poor but generous neighbors with a \$50 bill and a neatly inscribed note: "We hope he will soon get well."

Unfortunately, the wish did not come true. More and more bone grafts, which slowly dismembered my body, were transplanted into my cancerous jaw—while osteomyelitis caused them all to be rejected. But nothing could diminish Bella's courage. She often remarked in her heavily accented English, "I fail to understand why women are regarded the weaker sex. It would appear to me we have more endurance and stamina than men."

Finally, disgusted by the endless surgeries, I asked for a discharge from Bellevue Hospital. The doctors demanded of Bella, "Where will he go with a bent wire replacing his jawbone, accompanied by chronic draining?"

"I shall nurse him back to life," she replied. "How? I don't know yet. We have faith in God."

So I returned home with a twisted face. Unwilling to see friends, I spent my time avidly reading German books on anatomy and surgery. The physicians had said that any additional bone transplant would be a failure and might stimulate a metastasis of the tumor. My only alternative was to live—to live on borrowed time with an empty hole in my mouth.

Again, Bella helped to sustain me. After spending a day at work, she would come home, wash me, and while hiding her tears, lecture on the miracles of the body and the phenomena of tumor regression. She worked at keeping my spirit alive: "Surely you did not survive all this tragedy to succumb to a disease in this great country."

"You know my dear," I responded, "I have a feeling that somehow a miracle will occur and I shall conquer this deadly disease."

"I know you will." She embraced me tenderly, burying her tearful face on my chest.

Thus, there I was on that late afternoon, lying in bed thinking. Did it pay to survive the horrors of Nazism in order to die in the midst of freedom and prosperity? What could I do? Although I had been faced with adversities in the past somehow I had always survived. Yet how can one overcome a terminal disease?

Deep in my heart I had the faint hope that once more I would survive. I was sure it was God's will—but how? Suddenly a thought occurred to me. Why not seek the advice and assistance of the wisest living creature—Albert Einstein? I always had a great admiration for this man, who in my judgment represented a rare blend of altruism and intellect—one who walked in the steps of Gandhi. Einstein, of course, was not a logical choice to help a man dying of cancer for he was not a physician, but this was no time for logic. I was desperately trying to save my life. I rationalized my decision by reasoning that doctors did not try hard enough to save lives unless they were well paid and I had not been able to pay them as a free patient. Thus, perhaps I could be saved if I could obtain financial assistance. Perhaps Einstein could advise me.

Bela rejected the idea as simply unrealistic, but I was determined to see Einstein. I dressed and decided to go to Princeton. As I was leaving the house, I met a friend who asked where I was going as it was unusual for me to leave the house alone. I replied that I was going to Princeton. Jokingly, he suggested that I say hello to Einstein. Little did he know that I intended to do so.

I reached Princeton by bus and went to the Institute of Advanced Studies where they gave me the professor's address. As I approached his home, I realized the difficulty of my mission. This was a period during which Einstein had become withdrawn; just a few days before he had refused to see a reporter. As a man who cherished the sanctity of life and the dignity of man, he suffered from guilt over the atomic bomb, as I found out later. Having been instrumental in its development as a drastic step to rescue the world from the Nazi menace, he was tortured by the thought that it could destroy hundreds of thousands of lives. Further, many unscrupulous people sought to reach him for their own selfish purposes. And above all, his shyness and modesty called for total seclusion. Thus I realized that it would be unlikely that I would get to see him.

Hesitantly, I knocked on the door of his modest home. Soon a middle-aged housekeeper appeared and in her heavy German accent advised me that the professor could not be disturbed. I summoned my courage and loudly stated my business in German.

My strategy was simple, but daring. I was determined to state my mission so that the great man could hear the depth of my drama and invite me in and this is what happened. As I was talking with the housekeeper, the attic door opened and Albert Einstein emerged. His large, penetrating eyes were warmly focused on me. His long gray hair, like a halo, surrounded a benign, patriarchal face, full of warmth and compassion. I knew I was in the presence of a saint. Awed, I could hardly speak.

He descended the creaking stairs slowly.

"Come over here," he said inviting me to his austere study.

I mumbled a few words which were probably incoherent. Then I heard him say, "I am so glad you came to see me." This was no sarcasm—it was sincere. "Why didn't you come to see me earlier? Perhaps I could have been more helpful then, but after all I am no physician. I must rely on my friends' judgment. But I shall do all I can to restore your health."

I stayed for dinner with Albert Einstein. He said he would get in touch with his physician friend and do all in his power to help me. As he shook my hand at the door, he said firmly and warmly, "You must come to see me again."

As I rode the crowded bus back to New York a powerful ray of hope shone in my heart. I knew he was the only one who could help me. Yet it sounded so incredible. Why, I wondered, would this great scientist, so aloof even to members of his own family, so inaccessible to the mightiest, devote his time to a person like myself? To what could I attribute his warmth and compassion? I saw him as a true saint who showed contempt for might and wealth, but who was touched to the point of tears by a suffering human being.

The next morning a call came to my home. My landlady was bewildered when a doctor asked to speak with Mr. Stern on behalf of Professor Einstein. Soon, my visits to Albert Einstein became frequent. These were the most memorable events in my life. I recorded many of our conversations—hoping to publish them, but later they were stolen from me.

Finally the long hoped for miracle did occur—thanks to Albert Einstein. I was admitted to the Mayo Clinic. Again Bella gave me strength. Over my protests, she accompanied me to Minnesota where she rented a small room with the assistance of a relative and the generosity of the Clinic. During the tests and surgery which followed, Bella stayed by my bedside, sleeping in a chair

Once she asked the doctor, "Could I offer him my hip? After all there is so little left of him after all these surgeries."

"Are you serious? What a magnificent example of loyalty. No, Mrs. Stern. From the limited experience that we have, only a graft of a close relative such as a father has any chance of success —yours would be rejected. We shall take his rib and transplant it into the jawbone and I assure you it will be successful."

"Why were the former surgeries unsuccessful?" Bella asked.

"Please don't quote me, but your husband was neglected. His first surgery consisted of the removal of the diseased jaw, removal of the rib, and the grafting of it all in one surgery. This was too much. Osteomyelitis set in rejecting the graft. Now we will first remove the wire substitute for the jaw bone and let his jaw heal. Then we will proceed to extract his rib and graft it. We hope we can save his life."

"You will have saved two lives," Bella replied.

Soon the surgeries were completed and hope replaced despair. Bella became a vital part of the therapy—so much so that the clinic relocated her nearby. She would raid the library for me, and I read voraciously all that I could obtain. God only knows how she survived the eight months, as her only income was a small subsidy from the clinic.

"Bella, we should put you on our payroll," my surgeon, Dr. Figi, suggested half in jest. "Nothing could have been done without you. Where do you find your courage?"

"I do quite well," she replied. "I get my strength from Aaron's recovery."

And thanks to Albert Einstein and the generosity and competence of the Mayo Clinic, I did recover. In the spring of 1951, I emerged with a successfully transplanted jaw bone. Cured and happy with a new lease on life, I went back to New York accompanied by my loyal wife. I did not know it then, but my experiences were destined to have a great influence on the rearing and education of my yet unborn daughter.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Intellectual Growth Starts at Birth*

Unfortunately, my good health did not last. While the cancer was gone, my body, weakened by years of abuse, succumbed to new ailments. First I developed thyroid trouble, then heart disease. Together the doctors described it as an elaborate syndrome. I was repeatedly hospitalized with only occasional short periods at home. Again, Bella kept my spirit alive. Her frequent visits to the hospitals became her only recreation and the people she met there provided her only social life.

In August, 1952, during this period of ill health, our daughter Edith, was born. I was home between hospitalizations when the time came. Bella arose during the night and without waking me went to the hospital. The next morning I was called to the public phone in the rooming house where an intern informed me, "Mr. Stern, your wife has given birth to a healthy girl."

Surprised, I replied, "How can that be? My wife must still be sleeping in the room."

I hurried to the hospital. "Why didn't you wake me up?" I inquired of Bella as she held the crying infant at her side.

"Well, I was afraid that awakening you might cause a relapse of your condition." Bella followed the same pattern again almost eight years later when our son, David, was born.

As I looked at my healthy, six-pound daughter, I could not help but recall how a year earlier, Bella had been warned by a hospital physician not to have children by "the man who nearly epitomizes the whole textbook of pathology, for it won't be normal. The war experiences have left a deep scar on him which will never heal."

Thus in defiance of the resident's advice, Edith was born and I was determined that his prognosis would be wrong. However, I did not plan that Edith should be only a normal child, rather I publicly stated that I shall make her a superior human being, able to make a lasting contribution to the world. When I invited friends to see her I told them bluntly that she was destined to become "a genius." By that I meant I would dedicate all my talents and energy to training her from babyhood to become a finely-balanced and superior human being, with an intelligence developed to its most remarkable potential, keenly aroused to the greatest values in life, a mind richly stored, capable of the clearest, the most independent and most humanly important thought.

Bella was opposed to my plans. She insisted that all she wanted was a normal child, not a genius or an outstanding intellect. However, I stuck to my plans, thus beginning years of conflicts with my wife who, until this time, had been my salvation. Time and time again, my dreams of making Edith into a genius and Bella's desire for a normal child were to clash. Later, I became so engrossed in "molding" Edith, that her mother had to give up some of her responsibilities toward the child.

For example, after her mother discontinued breast feeding her at five months, I insisted that I should feed the baby, for as I told Bella, "This period is conducive to learning."

"Please don't deny me this pleasure," she pleaded.

"Someday, you will realize the significance of my methods." Reluctantly, Bella gave in.

Our home at that time was not the highly equipped learning environment many educators would say was necessary for the development of a superior mind. We were quite poor and we lived in a one room attic at Sea Gate, a once fashionable oasis of Coney Island. We shared the bathroom, which had extremely poor sanitary conditions, with six other families. One of the occupants was an eighty-five-year-old man who would frequently fall asleep for hours while using the bathroom. Heating in the winter was inadequate and hot water was scarce. The furniture—which was all of our worldly possessions—consisted of two beds, an old table, and three chairs, which were of too recent vintage to be considered antique, yet too old to be functional. But there was a bookcase bulging with books, and two special items which were destined to influence the baby. These were an old German encyclopedia and an old, but

well functioning radio. I did not regard poverty and deprivation a handicap in the attainment of my goal.

Too proud to consider assistance from any source, we were the only family in the building not living on welfare. Not having a crib for Edith, we improvised one from a closet drawer taken from the basement.

The day after Edith came home, I re-entered the hospital where I stayed for three weeks. Upon returning home I started the developing process. "Bella, from now on," I said in Polish, "The radio should be tuned to WQXR at all times. It is the only station broadcasting classical music continuously. Let the volume be merely audible when the baby is asleep and louder when she is awake, but by all means let the child be always exposed to fine music."

"What will the neighbors say?"

"Well, old as they are, they sleep too soundly to be awakened easily. On the other hand, music during the day is perfectly proper."

"How will Edith react to music?" Bella wanted to know.

"Her reaction will be desirable or rather there will be no reaction at all since this will be the only environment she will know. Music will shut out everything but the most harmonious sound. This shall be the first step in her education."

Bella was less than convinced. "No one has ever treated a baby like this. God knows what will happen to her."

"Well, Bella. Apart from the fact that I am fully convinced of the successful outcome of this experiment, Edith would otherwise hear the squeaks of passing carts, slamming doors, our quarrels as well as those of our neighbors, and the constant flushing of the toilet. Intellectual growth should begin at birth and end only at death. This is the best way I or anyone can reach the baby at her age." Reluctantly, Bella gave in to me.

The radio was turned on, never to be silenced again except for repairs. The soft, melodious flow of Chopin on the piano filled the room. Edith at first moved her body nervously, but soon fell asleep calmly without a cry. She awoke later, was fed at her mother's breast, then calmly and contently, she rested for an hour or so, while the music played softly. Soon, even changing her diapers was not an ordeal, for she cried much less. Later as she was giving Edith her bath, Bella remarked, "It

seems to me that she splashes her feet in the water to the tune of *Prince Igor*. Indeed, music became Edith's constant companion.

When Edith was eight weeks old, I reported in my diary in German, "It seems to me that the best way to pacify Edith when she cries is to increase the volume of the music. In contrast however, she becomes restless and unhappy when popular or jazz music is substituted for the classical music. An adverse reaction will even occur when the baby sleeps, for she will instantly awake crying."

She became so familiar with classical music, and loved it so much that a beautiful smile would cross her face at a favored passage of *Swan Lake* or *Carmen*.

When Edith was taken for a stroll in her Victorian carriage near our house, the radio was placed in the middle of the lawn, with a long extension cord. It would then be turned to the highest volume while my wife wheeled her around the house. When she was occasionally taken on more distant trips she was always restless, for she could not hear the music. Later the problem was resolved by a friend who gave her a beautiful portable radio.

My eccentric conduct in the house at Highland Avenue, Brooklyn, was frowned upon by the neighbors but tolerated because "He is a sick refugee who survived the hell of the Nazis." However, on the Day of Atonement, the most solemn holiday in the Jewish calendar, my neighbor, an old man could not restrain his indignation any longer. He knocked on my door and complained in Yiddish, "We tolerate your outrageous conduct, this constant crazy music for a long time. But on this holy day of Yom Kippur how dare you turn on the radio?"

"Well, my dear man. Perhaps this is the way in which our child seeks communion with God."

"Who can understand these crazy refugees." He slammed the door and never exchanged another word with me.

Aside from the great attachment to music which Edith developed, there was nothing particularly remarkable about her early childhood. Like other young infants, she slept a lot, occasionally was cranky, and loved her food. At times she suffered from diaper rash and diarrhea, but generally enjoyed good health and gained weight normally. Her motor ability and general physical development seemed to be average. But unlike many other babies, she did not enjoy a separate nursery room or

expert medical care. When she was ten weeks old, we were able to replace the closet drawer with an old dilapidated crib given to us by a friend. The crib stood in the center of our dingy, poorly furnished room. Bella was able to provide the medical care thanks to her nursing background; Edith did not have to see a physician until she was eighteen months old.

By the time she was ten weeks old, her crib was filled with meaningful educational toys and illustrated books. Her dolls had social significance as they were of many races obtained from the gift shop of the United Nations building. I considered it to be very important to have both black and white dolls, because I was determined that my child would not be prejudiced toward anyone. There was also a great variety of animal pictures from the Bronx Zoo and flashcards of the numbers from one to ten. These were never removed from her crib.

Another important factor in her early education was the conversation between Bella and myself. I decided that we would speak only in English and in a very calm and slow manner, facing her whenever possible. She soon began to focus her eyes attentively on each speaker.

Also, I began to talk to Edith at an early age. There was no baby talk such as, "Milky drinky," or "Bu-bu,, let's go bye-bye." Rather, both Bella and I addressed ourselves to her as an adult in an articulate and mature manner. "Please be quiet. Open your mouth, Edith, and let me wipe you. Where is your mother? Do you like the music? Please try to sleep some more. Do you want milk?" are examples of what she heard at approximately four months. I had named every doll and expected her to identify it. Similarly, she identified her animals a month later. At that time, the baby amazed me, as my diary states, by "recognizing approximately 400 words which she identified by gesture."

Partly because of our extreme poverty, Edith had the almost constant presence of her parents. This atmosphere, we were told, could be very detrimental to a child's development. However, because of the deplorable housing and my determination to mold her, Edith was destined to be always at the center of activities. Thus, she shared in the sorrows and the occasional joys of the family To compensate for our material shortcomings, Edith enjoyed great affection, which she fully reciprocated. Both her mother and I held her in our arms for a good part of the day, always talking to her intelligently. In order to attract her attention, I would lower the volume of the radio and say to her

slowly and clearly, "I love you so much my Edith. You are such a pretty girl. Would you like to go out?" By 6½ months, a nod of her head would suggest understanding.

Undoubtedly, one of the most effective methods of working with her was my daily routine of reading aloud. This I did not only to master English, but also in hopes I could communicate its meaning early to her. Edith was not receptive to the reading like any other infant of her age. However, this did not deter me. For weeks I read stories to her without noticing any degree of comprehension while being ridiculed by my friends and neighbors and being scolded by my wife. "You may talk to her until your face will turn blue. She simply is too young to comprehend it and there might be some ill effects too," I was warned by a friend who had the good fortune to study under Freud.

Gradually, however, Edith became accustomed to the routine and seemed to like it. She would point to the radio which meant that I should reduce the volume of the music in order to read. The daily reading sessions lasted from an hour to an hour and a half. I would select a simple passage of a story designated for six to eight year-old children and slowly read: "The hungry child asked his mother for food." An illustration below the story made it more comprehensible. I would repeat the sentence three or four times and point out the appropriate part of the illustration. "You see, Edith, this is the boy and here is his mother." Edith, of course, was not able to make but a few sounds in response. I went on reading.

Later, during the afternoon hours, I would read aloud from *Life* magazine for about thirty minutes. The selections were simple and always accompanied by pictures. On alternate days, I read illustrated, softbound storybooks which I had bought for ten to fifteen cents.

Another effective part of this early training was Edith's trips with me to a neighborhood movie theater where she watched the cartoons. Occasionally, we also watched appropriate features such as a Walt Disney film. The trips to the theater began when she was seven months old. Afterwards, at home, I would slowly describe in great detail to Bella what had happened. These descriptions delighted the baby as her facial expressions showed; sometimes a sad event would make her cry. "And the poor little cat is always afraid of the vicious dog." I could see that Edith recalled the episode which she had seen earlier on the screen. "So the poor lost sheep is looking for her mommy." The seven-month-old infant's sad brown eyes turned to her mother.

The spring of 1953 ushered in warm weather after a dreary winter and Edith was finally relieved of a persistent cold. I was able to take her out more frequently for longer strolls. As Edith reached her eighth month, I intensified my efforts. There were more monologues, more illustrated books, and a greater stress on self-reliance in feeding and toilet training. The child's alertness and sensitivity seemed to increase substantially. She responded to stimulation much better than I had hoped. My diary of April, 1953, records, "It is my profound impression that Edith, lacking the verbal skill to express herself, nevertheless understands me clearly." It was by then evident to me that my efforts were beginning to be crowned with success.

However, none of our observers, including my wife, shared my optimism. "In my judgment, her responses are no different from my daughter's," our friend commented, whose daughter was two weeks older than Edith. In fact, her remark was partly true, for her daughter showed a far greater promise than Edith as I assessed her. But eighteen years later, having relied on public school education her daughter was seeking admission to college, while Edith had been teaching college for three years.

I was so pleased with Edith's development that in an exhilarated mood a week later I recorded in my diary, "Like the spring sunshine which melts the dreary, all encompassing icy landscape, so does Edith's intellect emerge in its splendor." Henceforth, her mind blossomed as daily discoveries challenged her developing imagination.

Edith not only continued to develop intellectually, but also physically. She began to walk at ten months and two weeks. I recorded the event in my diary on June 28, 1953. "Edith remains standing, holding to the crib for periods of seven to ten minutes without any visible difficulty. Apparently she enjoys it for she smiles broadly. Today, I moved the crib close to the wall and placed the baby near it, whereupon she gripped the crib and uttered hardly audible sounds. Immediately, I walked over to the opposite wall and stretched out my arms. In one hand, I held a newly purchased illustrated book with a bright picture of a lamb on the jacket. By this time, her mother ran over and sat on the floor holding her. 'Come over darling,' I motioned with my hands. 'Here is a new book for you.' At first, Edith hesitated, but soon walked the distance of about eight feet, straight into my outstretched arms. 'Good baby,' I exclaimed. 'Good baby,' joined in my wife happily. Having received her reward, the new book, Edith walked right back to her overjoyed mother, who showered her with

kisses, and bestowed upon the child a warm embrace." After that occasion, Edith walked unassisted around the room.

At about eleven months, she began to build full sentences. At that age, my notes report, "Today, Edith was in an exceptionally receptive mood. She ate a good breakfast while listening to Verdi. As her mother changed her diapers I suggested, 'Be patient, your mother will make you comfortable and dry.'

"Yes, Daddy."

"Soon, we will go for a stroll."

"Good, Daddy." While Bella changed the diapers, Edith did not cry at all.

"At ten o'clock, when we returned from her stroll, I explained the family structure of the six dolls to her. She promptly recognized the father, mother, and children. 'What does Daddy do all day long?'

"He works," she replied.

"Where does he work?"

"On a farm," she answered.

"What are the names of the children?"

"Joseph, Dan, Mary, and Luisa," she replied and proudly pointed to the respective dolls.

"What animal do you like the most?"

"Rudolf, the lion."

"Why?"

"He is strong."

"Don't you like Diana, the small cat?"

"Yes, I do."

"How old are you, Edith?" At this question, she pulled the flash card bearing the number ten and lifted one finger. I was so pleased with her performance that I swept her off the floor, pressed her to my chest, and tenderly kissed her on the cheek. This, too, served an educational purpose, for Edith counted the kisses, "One, two, three, four, five."

She developed her manual dexterity and motor ability earlier than other children, but it lagged far behind her mental growth,

probably because of the demands placed upon her by my intensive work. Thus, she had the intellectual capacity to write at the age of one, but could not hold a pencil sufficiently well. Also she knew at one year how to control the volume of music, but lacked the manual dexterity to do so. She was toilet trained by then, wearing diapers only at night. She tried to undress herself at the same age when it was warm, but became angry when she failed to do so. Her self-reliance was so remarkable that she could play for hours without distracting anyone. However, this seldom happened as her mother or I were always at her side.

# CHAPTER 5

## *Old Posters and an Abacus*

A few years ago, after I had given a talk on the methods which I used in working with Edith, a renowned educator asked, "Would you recommend subject teaching in a broadly integrated area on an elementary school level? If you favor the area method, how do you think it can be best implemented?"

"Well, gentlemen, a worn out travel poster can serve this purpose in an excellent manner." A ripple of laughter greeted my reply, but I was very serious. As I had discovered in my school in the displaced person's camp years earlier, travel posters can have great educational value.

When Edith was about a year old, I talked a travel agent out of a stack of old posters with which I covered the walls and ceiling of our room. My objective was to ensure Edith would see beautiful and inspiring sights. The posters portrayed the fjords in Norway, a medieval castle on the summit of a green foothill in Bavaria, a majestic snowcapped mountain in Switzerland, Egyptian pyramids baking in the merciless sun of Africa, the Statue of Liberty with its outstretched arm, a picture of a smiling Austrian peasant in a folk dress, an airplane zooming proudly above the Manhattan skyline, and a famous Talmudic scholar submerged in study by candlelight.

She also had to see the other side of the coin, so there was a moving picture of a child with sad, large, black eyes in the midst of a war devastated city, a Korean boy in torn clothing, and Jewish refugees disembarking in Haifa.

Edith would intensely look at these pictures. Sadness would replace joy as she moved her eyes from the carefree sight of the

Riviera to a war-devastated cathedral standing amid rubble. Similarly, her mood would change with the radio, switching from invigorating opera to the somber music of Rachmaninoff.

The pyramid poster was in the middle of the wall at Edith's eye level and she would stare at it for long periods. Apparently, something in the picture aroused her curiosity. Consequently, I chose this poster as an educational target. Later, each poster unfolded its wealth of information to her in geography, history, and natural sciences.

It all began innocently when Edith was fourteen months old. As I recorded it, I asked, "Edith, darling, what kind of animal is this?"

"A camel."

"Show me a picture of the camel in your cards."

"Here it is Daddy."

"Very good."

"Which is bigger, a camel or a dog?" The search for a picture of a dog frustrated her slightly. It was misplaced under her pillow.

"Do not rush, darling. You will find it!"

"Here it is!"

In the pictures, the camel and the dog appeared to be the same size. "Both are big," she cried.

I reached for her illustrated book. On the jacket was a picture of a man leading a dog.

"No, Daddy. Camel bigger."

"Very good!" I pointed to the camel driver, "Who is this?"

"A man."

"Fine. What is that?"

"A house."

"Where are the windows?"

"No windows."

"And what is this?" A moment of silence followed. "What do you play with on the beach?"

"Sand, sand, sand!"

"Very good!" I continued. "Edith, this is a pyramid."

Happily she repeated, "Pyram."

During the following several days, I told her simple stories pertaining to deserts. One of them I recorded. "There is only sand in the desert. No water, no trees. The sun is hot. People travel through the desert on camels." She became so engulfed in and identified so much with the story that she asked for milk even though she had finished a bottle minutes before. "Camels drink a lot of water before their trip across the desert and keep it in their bellies for a long, long time." Edith pointed to her belly, "People going through the desert keep water in bottles," whereupon she pointed to her bottle.

"Nice story! More, more!"

That afternoon the radio did not play clearly which made Edith nervous. "Music no good!" she insisted. Consequently, I decided to explore in greater detail the picture of the Talmudic scholar. I did this with great care, since the picture resembled my deceased grandfather. Furthermore, I was determined to instill in the child a love for books.

"What is this picture about?"

"Man reading a book."

"Good. Edith, do you like books?"

"Yes."

"Books tell you beautiful stories. They have nice pictures. Some day, I will teach you how to read."

"Yes, Daddy—yes, Daddy!"

"Do you like the man?"

"Yes."

"Is the man old or young?"

"He is old. What story is he reading?"

"Well, darling, the old man reads about the Jewish people of long ago. He loves to read. He reads during the day and at night. The more he reads, the smarter he becomes."

"I love books too."

"I know, darling, soon you will read for yourself."

"When? Teach me now!"

"Does the old man in the picture read his book during the day or at night?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you see a candle burning, so it must be night."

"What is a candle? Why doesn't he put the light on?"

"Long, long ago, there were no electric lights such as this." I put the light on. "People had to use candles to light the darkness." I turned off the light and in the dark, since it was twilight, I lit a candle.

"Nice, nice!" She clapped her little hands joyfully. "Daddy, I love books." She lifted the stack of illustrated children's books and kissed them tenderly.

"Yes, Edith, sweetheart, books will always be your best friends." She nodded her head.

"Give me music, Daddy." I went to a neighbor and borrowed a radio from him. Soon, the melancholy sounds of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* filled the room. This was Edith's favorite and before long she fell asleep.

The forsaken camel and his drives across the hungry desert became alive in our house. The next week, I told Edith stories from the Old Testament. I explained, "The Jews were forced to work very hard in Egypt. They had to build pyramids." I pronounced the word "pyramids" slowly and carefully.

Impatiently, she interrupted. "Daddy, this is a pyramid!"

I was pleased with her ability to relate. This time, I ended my story quickly since Edith became indignant at the cruel treatment of the Jews. "Bad Egyptians, bad people!" she exclaimed.

During the next two days, Edith was preoccupied with the Bavarian castle and the snow covered Jungfrau in Switzerland. She was excited over the fact that on the mountaintop there is eternal snow, while in the valley children play in warm weather. "You see, the higher up you go, the cooler it gets."

"Why?"

I evaded a direct reply since I felt that she would not understand. "Someday, I'll take you to the mountains and you will see for yourself." The Bavarian castle helped to mold her appreciation of beauty and of nature. "Pretty. Nice. Beautiful."

Although the sight of the pyramids had made her sad, I returned to it, for it presented a hidden educational opportunity. The blocks which were clearly identifiable could be used to stimulate her desire to count. By now, she knew all about the object, the surroundings, the nature of the desert, the geographic location which I pointed out to her on a globe, and its historical background. Edith was sitting on the floor and playing with her blocks.

"Come over here, Edith."

As usual, she responded cheerfully and crawled to where I sat. I expressed my pleasure by kissing her. Then I lifted her, which was difficult for me, turned to the poster and began to count the blocks by pointing to each one with a pencil. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven."

She became so excited she used the third person. "Edith do it! One, two, three, four!"

"Good."

"More, more."

"We will do it later." Before the week was over, she was counting up to twenty.

I removed the poster of the pyramids. It had served its purpose and I felt its presence was not desirable because of its effect on her. In its place, I put a poster of Haifa Harbor against the background of the majestic Carmel Mountain, a symbol of Spring and hope for the vigorous state of Israel.

Edith's educational progress was also aided by events which followed the first step upwards in our "socio-economic mobility." In late 1953, we moved from our one room attic apartment in Sea Gate to a three-room apartment in a rapidly dilapidating five story building on Surf Avenue in Brooklyn, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. In the rear of our building was the Half Moon Hotel, which, in its early days, won infamy as the headquarters of Murder Incorporated.

We arrived at our new residence in a friend's old station wagon containing our few personal belongings and a load of books. Judging by the expressions of the neighbors, we were less than welcome. "Another shipment of shiners? (beggars as translated into English)," sniggered an elderly lady to her companions.

"Indeed, it is time to move away before the building will totally rot away," replied the man.

Soon, the two old beds, the crib, the kitchen furniture, and the books which constituted our belongings were moved into the apartment. Bella, who had hoped to have a coat of paint to brighten the defaced walls, had to settle for the usual background of travel posters. Scornfully, she remarked, "Since we lack furniture which typifies living quarters, our residence may as well acquire the appearance of an office."

The silence with which our neighbors greeted us for some time after we moved in was finally broken by a widow occupying a nearby apartment. She knocked on our door one morning. "May I come in?"

"Of course," replied Bella, somewhat surprised. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Mania and I live on the sixth floor across from your kitchen window. I am about to refurnish my apartment. Would you care to take my piano since the movers asked me \$50 to remove it?"

Before the poor woman could complete her sentence, I cut in happily, fearful that my wife might reject the offer. "We shall be delighted! When can we have it?"

"At once."

That day, our meager possessions were enriched by a grand piano. But even more important, with the piano, there were 24 volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, aged by years but tempting with their hidden treasures of wisdom. Indeed, from the outset, I was determined that the encyclopedia would become an effective educational tool. However, the task was formidable, for my own efforts for self-improvement and the study of English using the *Britannica* met with great difficulties. I found the language so complex as to make my research of a given subject futile. I was continually looking up words in the dictionary, which was time consuming and tedious. By the time I had digested most of the words, I was too worn out to pursue my subject.

Edith, always alert, watched me intensely reading the "big book."

"Daddy, give me the book."

"What can you do with it, if you don't know how to read it?" I asked.

"Let me have it, please. I will take care of it."

"All night," I said, and Edith, a year and a half old, sat herself on the floor and began slowly to leaf through the pages.

"Daddy, what is an encyclopedia? What makes it different from other books?"

"Well, Edith, an encyclopedia deals with all the events and things known to man."

"Women too?"

"Yes, dear."

"How can one person know so much?"

"There are hundreds or perhaps thousands of learned people who are responsible for each volume of this great masterpiece."

"You mean a masterpiece as in music or art?"

"Yes."

"Dad, teach me how to read so that I can study the encyclopedia!"

"Soon, dear."

"When I learn to read, I shall read the encyclopedia from the beginning to the end." Edith's prediction was absolutely right, for in less than three years she had read it all from A to Z.

She became so deeply attached to the encyclopedia that at least one volume could always be found in her crib, which I replaced each day with another. Unable to read, she concentrated on the illustrations which I explained to her to the best of my ability.

After Edith was in college, a wire service reporter once inquired, "Mr. Stern, do you approve of using computers in the teaching of mathematics?"

"I would prefer a simple abacus," I replied.

"You cannot be serious about that."

"Indeed I am." I made this statement at the risk of being ridiculed by educators and electronics manufacturers who invest millions of dollars in computer teaching devices, yet I had very effectively used an abacus to teach Edith arithmetic. During one of my trips to the old book stores on the Lower East Side in search of inexpensive classics which Edith enjoyed enormously (she was permitted to browse through the books at the age of a year and a half), I had discovered an abacus. This was the first one I had

seen in America. Since it appeared to me to be a rare item, I bought it for the \$1.80 with which I had intended to buy four books. I saw in it an excellent tool with which to teach arithmetic to my eighteen-month-old scholar. While she was playing with it on the subway she seemed fascinated by the three different colors of the beads of her new toy and played with it for several days while I thought how to use the device effectively.

"How do you like your toy?" I finally asked.

"Fine. What is an abacus, Daddy?"

"How do you know the name of it?"

"Member the man in the store? You asked him for an abacus."

"Right, Edith. I asked for an abacus. What can you do with it?"

"Play?"

"You can also count. One, two, three, four." I moved the beads slowly from one side to the other.

"Show me, Daddy."

I raised her little finger and moved the beads, "One, two, three, four. Can you do it yourself?"

"Yes, Daddy."

Within five days, Edith was able to count all the beads—a sum of one hundred. Soon, with the abacus she could do addition and subtraction of two digit numbers.

"Edith, count eighty-five beads and move them to the other side of the abacus."

"Yes, Daddy." Slowly, but accurately she did it.

"Move back seventeen beads. Count the ones that are left." In six minutes and fifty seconds she gave me the correct number. She added thirty beads to twenty-seven with similar speed and accuracy. At the same time, she wrote the numbers, clumsily, however, since she lacked motor ability. Within the following month, Edith read numbers up to one hundred and mastered the multiplication tables through five.

She began to read at the age of twenty-two months. It is quite possible that she was reading earlier, for, from her early infancy, she had been surrounded by illustrated books. Her ability to identify letters was evident when she was twelve to thirteen months.

When she was a year old I played with her on the beach, using blocks bearing letters. "Give me the A block," I would ask her. She could correctly pick out the vowels, but she had difficulty with consonants. The selections of W and Q were especially difficult for her partly because of my own difficulty in pronouncing these sounds properly, since none of the languages I spoke prior to coming to the United States had them in their phonetic structure.

At home, Edith leafed through her books and judging by the expression on her face, appeared to understand the contents at the age of one and perhaps earlier. Her attachment to the books, which numbered about fifteen, was so deep that when one became misplaced, she would cry until she could find it.

When she was eighteen months old I introduced flashcards to her. My technique was similar to that used in progressive kindergartens in teaching five and six-year-old children.

In August, 1954, I noted in my diary, "Today, because the weather is unfavorable, Edith remains indoors for the second day. She appears to be extremely receptive to instruction. Her knowledge of the alphabet is total, including all consonants. It is my belief that she will be reading within three days on a second-grade level."

The introduction of flashcards had produced good results. I had selected five cards which contained the words "cat," "dog," "man," "boy," "girl." After the fourth demonstration, Edith had made one mistake, ironically, on the word, "girl." The same afternoon, I introduced five additional flashcards with the words, "bird," "house," "horse," "mother," and "father." I was overwhelmed with the remarkable success we had as she read the ten words without difficulty. Before bedtime, I selected seven of the words in her book and she read them without the accompanying pictures.

Approximately a month later, Edith was reading forty words. I composed short sentences utilizing the words with which she was familiar and typed them in capitals. To add cohesiveness, I included several adjectives such as words for colors, "nice," "strong," etc., all of which she easily mastered.

Now, I sought ways in which to help improve her reading. One of these was through advertising. Signs became my most effective tool in her reading lessons. Every day, I would put her in the stroller and we would go for a long walk. Soon we became as much a part of the neighborhood scene in Brooklyn as the

fruit truck. Since we took our strolls about the same time every day, about two-thirty, we would find a dozen or so children waiting to join us. They would gather at the entrance to our building and would call out impatiently, "Edith. When are you coming down?"

I would hold her to the window, and she would call back, "When the music finishes." Then when the music was over and WXQR resumed its half-hour news bulletins, Edith would be ready. "Daddy, let's go."

The congregation of children became noisier by this time and we would hear the janitor objecting. "Get out, you kids, get out. He will be down soon."

Edith, who usually ran naked in the house, would get dressed. In the elevator, I gently lifted her up to press the button. "Which is the right one?" I asked her, but she had already pressed the lower one before she was told. "Good girl."

Two neighbors already in the elevator eyed us contemptuously. "He will drive that little girl crazy," one whispered to the other, "constantly teaching, constantly bothering her. Always loud music, always commotion. What a crazy family! They should have stayed in Europe."

When the doors opened and we stepped out into the street, the children cheered our arrival. "Edith," they asked, "where are we going today?" They would follow us on our walks, listening and looking as Edith read the signs along the streets. They, too, began to learn and read them out loud.

The route I had selected for this day was Mermaid Avenue. The traffic stopped on Surf Avenue as the strange caravan of children crossed the street, with Edith and her dad at the head of the procession.

When we reached Mermaid Avenue, our exercises began. "MERMAID AVENUE," we would recite in unison as curious strollers, not familiar with the neighborhood, stared at us in bewilderment.

Again I pointed to the street sign and repeated, "MERMAID AVENUE."

"Daddy, Daddy, wait!" Edith closed her eyes tightly, covering them with her little hands, then reopened them again with the thrill of discovering something exciting. Pointing her finger to the sign, she recited, "MERMAID."

After a short pause, the caravan resumed its trip toward Sea Gate. A sign occupied the whole side wall. "SALE," I read loudly, pointing to the store window. "SALE," Edith repeated, joined by the others.

An "open" sign was displayed prominently in the T.V. store. "OPEN," we all read loudly. There Edith happily discovered the familiar names of television sets displayed in the window and proudly read, "MOTOROLA" and "ZENITH." We waited while the others repeated after her, "MOTOROLA." Soon we moved away for reading brand names was not a part of my objective. As an educational opportunist, I wanted her to read signs which connoted a specific meaning in order to enrich her vocabulary while she learned the basics of reading. I had no objections, however, if she decided to learn the other signs.

Next on the street was a barber shop. Edith seized the initiative, "BARBER."

"Good. What does a barber do?"

"Cuts hair."

"Good, my darling." Praise was an important part of my method.

The children's chorus repeated, "BARBER."

At our main target of the day, the candy store with the newspaper stand displayed in front, Edith cried out, "LIFE," as she pointed to the magazine. "TIME. Daddy, you have this magazine at home."

"Yes, darling."

"Daddy, what is that?"

"That is a Jewish paper written in another language."

"Teach me. Daddy, teach me please."

"I will sometime in the future."

"Now . . . now!" she demanded with the impatience for learning which has become her life style.

The agitated storekeeper ran out of the store, "Move along. Beat it! I've got to make a living. This is no school."

The procession resumed its trip. "Well," I thought, "Someday I will sneak out of the house with Edith unnoticed. Then we will

be able to devote more time there." Soon we reached the supermarket where we usually stopped.

Delighted Edith recited from a distance, "MILK, BUTTER, SALAMI" as the chorus joined her in unison.

From the distance appeared our neighborhood patrolman. "Mr. Kelly . . . Mr. Kelly . . ." Edith called.

He stopped and said, "What are you doing, man. You are creating traffic congestion. Ain't they got a school? The merchants have been complaining."

"Well, officer, that is the best way I can teach my child."

"Let her go to school."

"She is too young."

"Wait until she grows up."

"Then it will be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"For learning."

"What crazy talk," he said. "How about the rest of the kids; they surely aren't too young."

"No, they simply follow us."

"Yes, we like it," the children chorused.

"Come on, move along."

So, our mobile school moved along to another and then another store, to the bakery with its tempting scents, to the real estate office with its window displaying many colored pictures, and to the laundry pouring out hot steam. Then firmly but politely, I told the other children, "Walk along the boardwalk home. We are just a block away."

"We'll see you tomorrow," they called as they went. "Good bye, Edith. Good bye, Aaron." Edith threw kisses at them.

Accustomed to the routine, she said, "Now do we go inside the store?"

"Yes, my darling," I replied as we entered the large supermarket leaving the stroller on the sidewalk. I carried Edith as we moved along the aisles.

"Daddy . . . here . . . here . . ." I reached for the can and

read part of the label. Then I asked her to read it. "FISH" she excitedly read. Then "BUTTER, TEA."

"What do you do with tea?"

"You drink it."

Then we read "SUGAR." "What does Mommy do with sugar?" I asked.

"Puts it in tea . . . makes it sweet."

"Where is the tea?"

"Right here, Daddy," she said pointing to the other aisle and grabbing a small package of tea.

One spring day as we were walking along loudly reading the signs, accompanied by many children, a passing car stopped at the traffic light. Then it abruptly pulled to the sidewalk and a well dressed man got out. At first I thought he was a plain-clothes policeman coming to disperse the crowd, but then he asked how old Edith was. I told him two years. "But why do you ask?"

"How can a two-year-old child read?"

"You see she does."

"How do you train her?"

"As you can see, this is my method. This is my school."

"But the other children must be much older."

"Indeed they are. They are six and seven."

"I'm six," said little Jackie.

Then I asked him who he was and what he wanted. "I'm a T.V. producer," he announced. "Would you let your little girl appear on my program?"

"What would she do there?"

"Just read." He wrote down my name and telephone number, then offered Edith a dollar saying, "I hope to hear from you soon." Little hands stretched from all directions for more dollars, but I refused to let Edith accept the money.

The children quickly spread the word around the neighborhood "Edith will be on T.V."

"I knew Aaron's eccentricities would land him there some

day," Mrs. Jacobs told my wife. Everyone was excited, that is everyone except the Stem family.

Soon I received a call from the producer. "Why haven't I heard from you? Don't turn down a chance of making a few hundred bucks. I'm sure you could use them on clothing and education."

"Would you let me make a statement on the air in which I would explain my method of teaching?"

"I cannot. It would not be consistent with the format of the show. Anyway, aren't you teaching the way the schools do?"

"Just the opposite."

"So your statement would offend a major segment of our viewers, perhaps the sponsors."

"Most likely."

"Please be realistic for the sake of your child. Don't deny her three hundred dollars."

"I'm sorry, but I can't accept." Thus Edith who made frequent television appearances later, could have made her debut at two.

Progressing rapidly, she was soon reading advertising messages such as "The Best Buy," "Good For Your Health," and "Will Protect Your Health," referring to products, some of which were worthless and others which were downright dangerous to one's health, such as cigarettes. I did not want such advertisements to have a harmful influence on her, so we switched the reading lessons from signs to books and magazines. She would continually beg, forever it seemed, "Take me to the store to read the boxes and cans."

"No Darling, that is for little babies. Big girls read books to learn."

"Yes, Daddy, I love to read stories," she replied.

Sometimes when we strolled discussing the books which she had read, we saw the gang of children pursuing the ritual which we had started, walking from store to store while reading the signs "Daddy, it is so babyish. Why don't they read books?"

"They don't know how to read."

"They are big, they go to school and should be smart. Poor children." Then she said, "I love you. You teach me everything."

"You have a lot to learn."

"I will, I will, Daddy."

Thus, by the age of two, Edith was an avid reader, with a reading ability far superior to many children three times her age. Yet, there were many skeptics who didn't believe that a two-year-old child could read. My friend, Bob, was one of these. At the time there was a television program which conducted a contest of talking dogs. Bob, a great animal lover, was doubtful.

"Well, I don't know," I told him. "Perhaps there is one."

"Aaron, you must be naive."

"Bob, would you believe that a child less than two years old can read?"

"Of course not."

"I know of one."

"I'll ask my psychology professor about it." Then after a moment's reflection, he said, "Aaron, I'll bet you twenty dollars without consulting my psychology professor."

"Fine."

"Who is it?"

"My daughter, Edith."

"Aaron, you must be kidding me. Does she actually read?"

"You shall see."

That evening, Bob along with his instructor came to the apartment. Sitting on my bed since there were not enough chairs to accommodate us all, we watched as Edith, unconcerned, played with her dolls. The radio played Mozart. The instructor asked, "Do you suggest that this child is capable of reading?"

"Judge for yourself." I reached for ten neatly typed short sentences which included about seventy words. "Which one should we select?"

"Take any at random."

I took one and handed it to Edith. "Please read it, Honey."

"Yes, Daddy." Then she read, "A girl has a dog. Her father works hard."

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-three months."

"Incredible. What is your method?"

"I simply teach her."

The next day, Bob insisted that I accept the twenty dollars "I can't do it, Bob." Finally, he persuaded me. This was the only bet I ever made. With the money, I purchased a new radio which served us well for many years.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Edith Blossoms*

After Edith began to read, new horizons opened up for her. One of the many books which she read at the age of two was the children's version of the Old Testament, which she tremendously enjoyed. The acts of heroism and devotion fired her imagination; she loved the humility of young David and she applauded the determination of Moses. But she also was critical of the misdeeds.

"Daddy, why is Solomon so rich?" she asked. "Why must he have so many wives?" After reading about Joshua fighting to conquer the promised land, she said, "Surely, there were some innocent people. Why did they have to die? Why didn't the Jewish people obey the law of God?" I explained to her that people have always sinned and that we should hope there will be a just world someday. "When?" she asked.

Her reading was not limited to books. At the age of two, she read in the paper that a twenty-story building was being erected near our home. During a stroll, Edith stood for a moment staring at the building, which was actually only eighteen stories high. When we returned home, she obtained the number of the newspaper, then called the editor and reported the mistake. The next day the paper printed a correction.

When she was two years and three months old, a routine physical examination revealed a heart murmur. A few months later, she contracted a streptococcal infection and was hospitalized for observation. She seemed calm and unbothered by the hospitalization. She continued to read her books and we brought her a radio from home so that she could continue to have music. Some parents of the other children in the ward complained that the

music annoyed their children, and the hospital considerately put Edith in a small, separate room.

She was always self-sufficient. "Go home and sleep," she would tell me.

"I'd love to stay overnight with you."

"Go home and rest, Daddy. I'll be fine. Come tomorrow and bring me a lot of books."

The next morning, I brought them to her and asked the nurse how she was.

"What a remarkable child you have. Not a sound came from her during the night. She even went to the bathroom by herself. What puzzles me is why does she have the radio on all the time? She even listens to the news, as though she understands it. During the night an orderly tried to turn the radio off twice and both times Edith woke up and stopped him. Yes, I believe that she is a remarkable child."

Edith was discharged from that hospital and soon entered another one. During this period of hospitalization, she behaved quite maturely.

My work with her now had an added dimension. She gained insights into anatomy and physiology. I discussed with her the purpose of electrocardiograms, X-rays, stethoscopes and other medical instruments. She was happy and content, grasping for the new and unknown.

She understood that her mother could not visit her frequently because of her job. She would tell the nurse. "My Mommy cannot come to see me. She is working."

Unable to arrive at a definite diagnosis, the doctors assumed that she had suffered from rheumatic fever at some time. As a precaution, they prescribed penicillin daily for the rest of her life. I took a dim view of the prospects of a lifetime medication and the penicillin was later terminated in Florida inspite of the doctor's disapproval. She has enjoyed perfect health. Several years after the diagnosis of rheumatic fever, the Miami National Children's Cardiac Hospital diagnosed the murmur as an innocent one.

In spite of her ill health, Edith was quite active and adept at riding her tricycle. The best place was the Coney Island boardwalk, where she rode each day. Once on the boardwalk, Edith demanded a quarter from me. Since a quarter was a lot of money

for a two year old, I refused to give it to her. Soon she disappeared into the crowd. At first, I wasn't concerned, but as time passed and she didn't return, I became alarmed. Finally I notified the boardwalk police, who had already found her on the Brighton Beach boardwalk about two miles away. The police told me that she had asked them for money, claiming that I refused her books and food.

As Edith developed a mature mind, she began to interact with adults. One she met at this time was Albert Einstein. It was in early 1955 when I was hard at work on a book detailing the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In addition to numerous interviews with refugees and survivors of the concentration camps, I secured comments about the era from prominent people who had either studied or who had first hand experience with it. I was particularly proud to record Einstein's observations. After Einstein had helped me to obtain the surgery, I frequently visited him and he assisted me in my work. The last time I went I took Edith along to meet the great man whose picture, along with those of Tolstoy and Gandhi, hung on her wall.

As the Greyhound left the Holland tunnel, Edith leafed through a biography of Einstein. Now I began to worry about bringing her along without first obtaining Einstein's permission. It was rude of me and I did not know how I should explain her presence.

When we arrived at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Edith ran directly to him. "My name is Edith. I've heard so much about you, Professor. Your picture is right above my bed." Einstein seemed slightly bewildered.

"What did you hear about me?" he asked.

"Mainly about your work on atomic energy. I love you for helping my Dad to get well."

"How did I help your father?" he asked. Edith told him what he had done. "Remarkable. How old is she?"

"Two and a half, Dr. Einstein," I replied.

"Yes. You told me earlier. But it is simply incredible." The day belonged entirely to Edith and Einstein; I never got the opportunity to ask the questions for which I had made the trip.

"Edith, what will you do when you grow up?" the professor asked.

"I will study hard to help others." Then a book on his shelf caught her eye. "May I look at this book?"

"Of course."

But the book was disappointing for it was in German. "Daddy," she said nearly crying, "I can't read it."

"Does Edith actually read?" He passed a newspaper to her and asked, "How about that?"

She began to read an article headlined, "Report from Washington."

"Do you know, Edith, my mother told me that I was seven years of age when I began to read."

"How pitiful," Edith responded. "You missed all the fun. Didn't your Daddy teach you earlier as my father does?"

"Apparently I was not ready for it."

He became so engrossed with Edith that my presence became superfluous. Edith was at her best asking questions while Einstein answered and wrote on the board. "Do you mind if I call you Grandfather? My grandparents were killed by the Nazis."

Einstein was visibly touched. "Yes. Please do."

Within an hour or so, as we were ready to leave, he said, "Aaron, your daughter is destined to make a valuable contribution to science. Cultivate her talents. Let me see her again." Edith was exhilarated for a long time after the visit, but unfortunately, she never was to see him again, for he died on April 18, only a few weeks later. We mourned him deeply; a black ribbon edged his picture above Edith's bed.

Shortly after the visit to Einstein, I was referred to a social worker to help me become adjusted after my illnesses. Although the visits to the social worker and later to the New York Vocational Rehabilitation Department were somewhat of a farce, they did indirectly help me to obtain a college education.

The social worker, a woman in her forties, lectured me on the traumatic effects of my war experiences and told me that I could expect to encounter difficulty in adjusting to American society. She politely warned me, "Do not seek material wealth in a strange country with your limited skills and language barrier." Then she added, "It may sound discouraging, but above all one must be realistic. This office has the task of finding jobs for many refugees, but frankly we have little success because of the damage done to them during the war." As I left, she put her hand on my shoulder

and declared, "Someday you will report to me about securing a job in a shop."

Shortly after that interview, I was requested to report to the Vocational Rehabilitation Department of the State of New York. While I waited several weeks for the appointment, I spent my time improving the linguistic skill. Soon, a letter from the Vocational Rehabilitation office arrived. I put on my only suit, given to me on my arrival in the country by the New York Association for New Americans, and reported for the interview.

At the office, I was greeted by a young and enthusiastic social worker who suggested that we speak in German since my English was still atrocious. I gladly consented, but apparently he did not realize that he spoke Yiddish rather than German. Soon he guided me through countless interviews and batteries of tests, of course "all paid for by the taxpayers."

After several weeks, I was summoned to the manager, who questioned me about my plans for the future. I told him I intended to pursue my education. I must have shocked him, for he left the room and soon returned again with two other men, one of whom was introduced as a psychologist. They told me the tests had revealed that I had "a surprisingly low intelligence for your ethnic group, but you have shown some skill in manual dexterity." After careful consideration, they recommended that I learn to become a welder. The state was willing to pay for the vocational training, but under no conditions would they recommend that I go to college. I left the office disgusted and never returned again in spite of the many letters which followed.

Two months after this sad experience, I went to the Dean of Brooklyn College, and asked to be admitted. At first he tried to talk me out of seeking a college education, but once he became convinced of my determination, he supported my application. As he later wrote, "He first presented himself at Brooklyn College with a request which he felt was a desperate attempt to salvage for himself and his family some measure of respect after the harrowing indignities of Nazi cruelty. The request was that he be allowed to matriculate for a degree. After examining his qualifications, it was found that Mr. Stern was not only eligible for admission but on the basis of examinations, he was allowed a block of credit toward his degree." Although I had attended a university in Poland before the war, my records were unobtainable and no direct credit was given for that work.

The dean became my counselor and assisted me in many

ways, including securing for me a scholarship from a Masonic lodge. Thus, I became a college student shortly before Edith's third birthday. Thirteen months later I received my bachelor's degree. During the time I was enrolled at Brooklyn College, I spent many months confined to a hospital. Having little money, I did not buy a single textbook, using instead books from the library. It is noteworthy that "the efficient and competent vocational rehabilitation office" continued to send me letters for more than a decade assuring me of its "readiness to assist me in training to become a welder." What could be a better motivation for one to pursue a college education?

My work with Edith continued during this period and I believe that my college attendance was probably beneficial to her education as well as mine. While I had always tried to be a model of a parent who sought knowledge and who placed a high value on learning, I was especially able to do this as a college student. Additionally, I was able directly to involve Edith in my learning experiences, occasionally taking her to class and discussing my courses with her.

I continued to work on my book, actively involving Edith in it. Since the book dealt with the Nazi cruelties, I was frequently criticized for exposing a young child to such emotional trauma. One of my friends asked, "Why should a child born in a free and prosperous country be subjected to the gruesome accounts of Nazi horrors?" Of course the same people had no objections to entertaining their children with television programs in which violence was rampant and where the criminal often emerged a hero. Bella, also, was critical of Edith's involvement in the book. Referring to the research, she once told a friend, "This was a big part of Aaron's life—too big."

On the other hand, I saw Edith's participation as a valuable learning experience. I believe that the annihilation of six million Jews taught her about the irrationality of hate and prejudice. There was no way that I could shield her from the violence and reality of life, so I preferred to employ it as a learning experience. Edith's grandparents, as well as many of her other relatives, were killed during the war and she had to know this. Further, I believe that she had to know the circumstances of their deaths. For example, my mother, whose appearance did not reveal her Jewish origin, chose to die in a concentration camp with my injured father, rather than seek refuge in a guerilla unit. Although tragic, this was a very heroic act and an excellent example of love and devotion.

In contrast, television has glorified crime. While our perpetual poverty did not permit us the luxury of a television set, Edith was often invited to the neighbor's home to watch it. I permitted her to see only children's programs such as *Mickey Mouse* and *Howdy Doody*, but sometimes without my knowledge she would see other shows. Once, at the age of three, she saw a western at the neighbor's. Later, she asked, "Daddy, how did they ever build up the West if all they did was kill each other?"

On another occasion, however, television proved to be very harmful. One day after Edith had seen a crime episode at a neighbor's house, we went to a nearby drug store. While I browsed through the book section, Edith noticed a policeman having a cup of coffee at the lunch counter. Quietly, she approached him from behind, pulled his gun from his holster, and stuck it in his ribs. The people nearby became deadly silent as I ran over to her and carefully took away the gun. The embarrassed policeman hastily left the store. Later when I told my neighbor about the incident, she said that Edith had seen a similar event on television that morning. Experiences such as this one show how great a threat irresponsible television can be to children.

She was a great help with my manuscript. She familiarized herself with the thousands of photographs which I had collected. Some of these were gruesome documentations of atrocities; others were pictures of pre-war synagogues, schools, children, adults, artifacts, and religious objects. Edith also sat with me while I conducted interviews with individuals who had participated in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, who had survived the Babi-Yar slaughter, and who had been guerillas committing sabotage against the German war effort.

During one interview, three-year-old Edith intensely questioned an elderly rabbi from Warsaw about the Ghetto uprising. "Why didn't the Polish people, themselves victims of the Nazis, join the Jews in the rebellion?" she asked.

"They simply did not care for the survival of Jews."

"Yes, but in the face of a common enemy? After all, they could predict their own doom which followed later during the Warsaw massacre."

"I don't know," replied the Rabbi who was becoming upset  
"How old is she anyway?"

Once I learned that a woman in Chicago had a rare picture of the slaughter of a Jewish congregation during the High Holidays in

a small Polish town. I called her and asked for the picture, but was refused. Then I went to Chicago, but she would not permit me to have a reproduction made. Finally, I called home and had Edith talk to her. "Wouldn't you help my Daddy with this important picture, so that the whole world could learn about the Nazi crimes, and thus perhaps prevent such an occurrence in the future?" The owner was deeply moved, and I obtained the priceless document.

Edith enjoyed the trips to the Judaic Division of the public library on 42nd Street in New York. She would carefully search the pictures in the various documents for ones which I did not have. Once she noticed a picture of a marching column of elderly Jews. "Daddy, here is a picture from Budapest."

"How do you know that it is from Budapest?" I asked.

"Simple. Here is the Danube dividing Buda from Pest." She was correct.

When I had several pictures pertaining to the same event, I could rely on Edith to select the one which I should use. "Daddy, take this one. You can see better the impressive face of the man lost in worship." Her choice was the final one.

As I had done with my research on the Nazi crimes, I made every effort to develop her character and to teach her to love other people. I stressed that violence was to be avoided at all costs and that she should be tolerant of everyone. Once, she came home from the boardwalk with her clothing ripped and her nose bleeding. I asked her what had happened, but she refused to tell me. Leaving her in her mother's care, I went outside to try to find out. As I approached the boardwalk, which was about 100 feet away, I saw a group of youngsters chasing a Negro girl. I learned that Edith had been hurt when she had come to the defense of the girl. This, I believe was a justifiable departure from the dictum of no violence.

A key aspect of the methods which I used with Edith was that I took advantage of learning opportunities as they occurred. Very routine events often provided the basis for considerable education. One morning I pointed to an old jalopy which splashed her dress as it drove by us while we were on our morning walk. "Edith," I asked. "How does a car run?"

"I don't know Daddy." This was all I needed. I had two dollars in my pocket which was all the cash I would have for a couple of days, but I decided to spend it on what others might

have regarded as a wasteful activity. Flagging a passing taxi, I took Edith for one of her first automobile rides since we had no car. As the taxi circled Coney Island, I explained to her all I knew about the dynamics of automobiles. By the time we arrived home, Edith knew more about a car than many adults.

At home I took the encyclopedia and read all that I could about mechanics. Then I began to challenge and probe Edith until she knew how an internal combustion engine powered a car. At the end she concluded, "So these endless explosions move a car. How simple." For the time being I was satisfied, but this was only the beginning.

Later we went back outside, and I asked Edith what the plates on the back of the cars were for. She did not know and asked me to explain. I was happy that she took the bait. "Read the number on the plate." I pointed to a parked car and she read the number, 5,866. "What is the meaning of it?" I asked.

She did not know and insisted that I explain it to her. I did not explain it, but rather we went back in the house. There I asked her to take her abacus and enter the figure of 5,866, then to subtract it from a million. "Fine. Good girl," I said and then I directed the conversation toward the importance of car identification and the number of cars in New York. "Do you know how many people live in the State of New York?"

"I don't know, Daddy."

"Seventeen million. Write it down." I gave her my pad and pencil and she wrote down the number.

Edith took the initiative this time. "How many cars are in the state?"

"Fifteen million," I replied. Of course, I had just looked it up.

"Almost every person has a car, yet you, Momma and I have none."

Slightly ashamed, I answered, "Yes that is true." Then I hugged and kissed her. My objective was to plunge into the study of the geography and the political structure of New York, but Edith had raised an issue which had to be dealt with first. I believe it is very important to answer children's questions when they ask them for it is then that they are interested.

"You know, Sweetheart, I have been sick for a long time."

"Ever since I can remember, Daddy."

"How far back can your memory go?"

"A long, long time. I remember when the ambulance took you to the hospital." That had been two years earlier when she was about one and a half.

"I suffered from a bad tumor. What is a tumor, my child?"

"You explained it to me last week. It's when the cells in our body multiply wildly. Sometimes they kill the person. You asked me to multiply big numbers while talking to me about it."

"You are right, Edith. Well, I suffered from this dreadful disease for a long, long time. I could not work. That is why we have so little money. But we have a lot of fun."

"Don't worry, Daddy. When I grow bigger I'll work in the big library among all those beautiful books. I shall buy you a big shiny car like Simon's." Simon had the finest car in the neighborhood, a new Cadillac.

"Good, Sweetheart. I love you." Then I took the encyclopedia and showed her a color picture of a cell. "That is what happens when they multiply." Now I could continue with my objective. "Edith, it is time to go to the library."

"Hurrah." She began to clap her hands.

At the library, the librarian teased her as usual. "There will be no more books for you. You're reading them all."

"Then I will read them again," she said instantly.

At the reading table, I showed her a map.

"What is a map? Why is it green? Tell me, Daddy."

We sat down and with a pencil I outlined the boundaries of the state of New York. "Try to draw it." I gave her my pad and pencil. The outlines were clumsy. After four or five attempts, she did relatively well and we turned our attention back to the map.

"Edith, this map is of our country."

"Yes, I know. The United States."

"Right. It consists of forty-eight states, one of which is New York. How many people live in the United States?"

"I don't know."

"There are one hundred seventy-five million. Write it down." She did. "How many people live in the State of New York?"

"I forgot."

"Oh, Edith. One should never forget important things."

"I'm sorry." She was too preoccupied with the map as her beautiful eyes searched and probed. "It is seventeen million, Daddy."

"How many states do we have in this country?" I asked.

"Forty-eight," she replied. "Dad," she suddenly cried, "it's New York—our city."

I then explained that New York City was the largest city in the State of New York.

When we got ready to leave, Edith wanted to take the map with her. I explained that some books and materials could not be checked out of the library, but that they had to remain for everybody to use. She decided to take four books which dealt with the geography of New York. As a bonus, the librarian gave her three old issues of *National Geographic* one of which was devoted to New York.

At dinner that evening, I asked, "Edith, what did we learn today?" She recited all the events. As she explained how the automobile ran, she made a mistake. "No, Edith," I interrupted. "That is not exactly how a car starts."

"You're right, Daddy." She corrected the error, and I realized that she was exhausted. The learning experiences of the day had covered what might have been a semester of school work for some children.

After dinner, Edith went to the sofa with the four books and the magazines where she read while listening to the *Swan Lake Ballet* on the radio. Within an hour she was in bed. It had been a productive day, but a typical one.

Reading had become an important part of Edith's life. By now she was finishing two or three books a day, utilizing every spare moment for it. For example, we insisted that she stop at eight-thirty and we turned the lights out as soon as she was in bed. We found out later that she often spread the blanket over her head after we left the room, and read far into the night by the aid of a flashlight.

We made daily trips to the library where I permitted Edith

to check out as many books as she could safely carry, usually from four to six. During one of our visits, Edith darted away from me as we were walking out the exit, and I did not realize that she was gone until after I was outside. A few moments later she ran through another door carrying several more books. Running across the street to where I was waiting, she tripped, fell, and dropped the books, tying up traffic for a few minutes. As I attempted to comfort her and to attend to her bruises, she sobbed, tears streaming down her cheek, "My knees will heal quickly, but not the books." The books had landed in a puddle of water.

One of the subjects in which Edith became deeply interested was horses. She seemed to have an insatiable love for them, reading avidly every book about them that she could get. As I was busily shopping in a supermarket, I was horrified to see Edith tearfully kick down a neat pyramid of canned horse meat. The store manager scolded her as other shoppers gathered to see what had happened. Heartbrokenly Edith complained, "Daddy, how cruel can people be, slaughtering horses to feed dogs?" I tried to explain the situation to the manager, but he demanded angrily how I could expect anyone to believe that such a little girl could read the can labels. There was no point in arguing with him.

Love, whether for horses or for family or for mankind, was an important aspect of Edith's life. We were affectionate with her and she was with us. I wanted her not only to develop her intellectual capacities, but also to have love and compassion for her fellow man.

One evening as we sat on the Coney Island boardwalk, I said softly, "Edith, I love you so very much."

"I love you too, Daddy."

"What is love, Edith?"

"It is hard to explain."

"Whom else do you love, Sweetheart?"

"I love Mommy, I love books, the boardwalk, music."

"Do you love other children?"

"Yes. But I feel sorry for them."

"Why?"

"Well, they know nothing. They run around wildly all day. Daddy, what is love, really?"

I began to talk about the many forms of love, about the attachment, the willingness to sacrifice, the inner warmth that one feels towards others. Edith, as always, was alert, readily following my explanation. "You mean love is like Romeo and Juliet, Ruth and Naomi?" she asked.

"Yes, you are quite right."

Then she added, "If I had a doggie, I would love him too."

I felt guilty, for I knew that she wanted a dog, but I could not afford to have one. "Someday, I'll buy you one."

"Good," she replied and then returned to the topic of love. "Moses must have loved his people dearly."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, in spite of their disobedience and sins, he led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. You know, Daddy, I love the ocean, the boardwalk, the sunset. I would not want to live anywhere else." Her mind was always active and wondering. "God must love the Jewish people, too."

"Why do you think so? After all, so many Jews have been killed throughout history, including your grandparents."

"That's true, but still we always seem to be able to survive. You know, Daddy, there are as many kinds of love as there are kinds of beauty."

"What is beauty, Edith."

"The sunset, a horse, Greek heroes, flowers. I think love and beauty go together in a rather strange way."

That night in bed, I marveled at the depth of her thoughts about such abstract things as love and beauty. Also, I felt an awesome responsibility to guide her properly.

At about this time, I decided that she was mature enough to learn the biological facts of life. Although Bella objected, I decided to undress in front of Edith, so that she could learn about male anatomy. She was inquisitive, as she was about everything, and posed questions which many parents avoid. I answered her questions as calmly and as accurately as I could. We discussed the process of reproduction candidly and Edith learned about menstruation, intercourse, and pregnancy. At times her enlightenment got her into trouble with her playmates. Once she suffered a black eye for insisting that babies were not delivered by storks

Many people have asked me if Edith played with other children. Yes, she did but she had little in common with most of them. I wanted her to enjoy life, fully and I believe play is an important part of growing up. In many ways, much of what Edith did was play to her; she learned as she played and she played as she learned. However, playing with other children was not often satisfying to her. From time to time I would ask her if she wanted to play with another child, and she would usually answer no, explaining that the other child was too babyish. Once I asked her why she didn't play house and she replied that it was too silly.

Often, though, she would join a group of youngsters who were playing ball, hopscotch, hide-and-seek or some other active game. It was a satisfying kind of change for her. When I observed her from a distance, I could see no particular distinction between her and the other children. She would smile and laugh with them and she would play hard and run fast. During the game she would be totally involved, but as soon as the game was over she would shy away from the others. In spite of the similarity of their ages, she was intellectually worlds apart from them.

While Edith had difficulty relating to children, she continued to surprise and impress adults. Shortly after her fourth birthday, I graduated from Brooklyn college. After the graduation ceremonies, the dean invited me to bring Bella and Edith to visit with him. As soon as we entered his office, Edith began to browse through his personal library. He seemed slightly surprised to see a young child show such an interest in books, and he suggested that she take the book off the shelf that appealed most to her. Without hesitating, she reached for a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He took the book from her, selected an article dealing with Israel, and teasingly asked her if she could read it. She began to read the article fluently. The dean was amazed and exclaimed, "but she's a genius!" Then he asked her to tell him all that she knew about Israel.

Edith began, "Israel is both the youngest as well as one of the oldest states in the world," and then continued to elaborate. Obviously impressed, he gently kissed her on the forehead.

As we were leaving, he picked Edith up and said, "You must be proud of your father. He completed a four-year-college program in one year and a month."

"I shall do better than that," she replied with conviction.

# CHAPTER 7

## *The Endless Quest for Knowledge*

Edith's educational progress continued and intensified as she grew older. One of the finest qualities has always been her insatiable quest for the truth, her avid pursuit of knowledge. Although, she seemed to learn almost effortlessly, her intellectual potential appeared to remain virtually untapped. If, as Socrates argued in Plato's *Republic*, a philosopher is one "who has a taste for every sort of knowledge and who is curious to learn and is never satisfied," then Edith was truly a philosopher.

As a child, she was my closest companion and disciple; and has always been my source of inspiration. In molding her, I always have been very concerned not only for her intellectual growth, but also for her spiritual and physical well being. I have stressed the significance of humility and compassion. I have steered her toward non-conformity, independence of thought, and courage of conviction, teaching that the truth was important, whether or not it was popular.

I held a teaching position after my graduation, and Edith began attending my lectures when she was four years old. I believe that she was greatly influenced by the comment which I made to my students at the end of each term: "If the only thing which I have impressed you with is the fact that nothing is white or black and that you should never cease to challenge truisms no matter how tempting they may be, then I shall have succeeded in my endeavor." Edith took this statement to heart.

She repeatedly demonstrated that she was willing to challenge others in the search for truth. At the age of four, the Sinai campaign in the Fall of 1956 greatly interested her so that she kept close touch with the news from the Middle East. She hoped that

Israel would not give up the land which it had conquered until a lasting peace had been established. In discussing Israel's future, which was dear to my heart also, I tried to be as objective as possible to prevent her from being prejudiced against the Arabs. I was determined she should always search for the truth, not letting her emotions rule her. I told her we could not overlook the fact that a million innocent Arab refugees had been uprooted because of the conflict. She replied, "the Arab states have so much territory they could easily absorb the refugees and that Israel had offered compensation if peace could be established."

In addition to my position, I was attending the graduate school of government at Columbia University where I took a course which dealt with the Middle East, covering its history, politics, and current events. Since the students were primarily Arabs and Jews, confrontations in class were common. Edith was anxious to visit Columbia and also to find out more about the Middle East, so I took her to class with me one day, where we sat inconspicuously in the back of the room. Because I had insisted she promised not to ask "even one single question," but her animated behavior during the lecture indicated that she was greatly interested. She later told me she found the period of questions at the end particularly painful because the Arab students were making inflammatory statements toward Israel.

After the lecture, I took her to the library. As we left, several Arab students were conducting "a documentary exhibition of Jewish atrocities in Sinai." Edith approached one of the Arabs and asked, "Where is this picture from?"

"Don't you know, little girl? These are Nazi-type Jewish murderers killing Arab women." Similar replies were given as she asked about each picture.

Finally Edith burst out, "What a lie! These pictures were taken during the Warsaw ghetto uprising; the attackers are Nazis! Aren't you ashamed to resort to such a lie?" The Arabs stood speechless while Edith continued. "I recognize these pictures since my Daddy collects them for his book." She was upset for the rest of the day.

Later, on the train out of the city, she criticized me for not taking a stand against the Arab allegations during the lecture. I explained to her that I wanted to conduct myself with dignity, unlike the other students. What I did not explain was that I had feared that if I had said anything she would also have participated in the class.

Our next stop was the school that I administered. She went to my office while I substituted for a sick teacher. The class was unruly and I was exhausted. Further, I had a headache and fever. As a result I was very permissive, and the class became loud and noisy. Edith was trying to read, but the noise disturbed her. Suddenly she opened the door, entered the class and scolded the children who were about five years older. "How ridiculous and childish you act by wasting my father's time. Education is the highest good of every human being. What a shame! What a shame that you don't appreciate it! If you don't desire to learn, why do you come here?" Abruptly she walked out, slamming the door. The reaction was short of a miracle; I had no need to raise my voice again. On the way home, Edith remarked, "You know Daddy, you should teach mature students like me so you would not have to cope with discipline problems."

A few days before Israel had invaded Egypt, the abortive Hungarian revolt had begun. Soon the Russians moved their troops and tanks into Hungary, while the other nations of the world cheered the bravery of the rebels, but refused to take any steps to assist them. Edith was very interested in the progress of the revolt and was greatly concerned when it became apparent that the resistance would be crushed. For example, one morning in November, she woke up about seven and began to read Andersen's fairy tales. Since she had missed the seven o'clock news on the radio, she called me over and asked about the revolt. I had been shaving during the news, so I told her about the previous night's report. She abruptly informed me that she had already heard it. Then I suggested that I could go down and buy a paper.

"The paper goes to press at seven o'clock in the evening. It can't report anything new."

Slightly irritated, I said, "You can wait another fifteen minutes for the next broadcast." This seemed to satisfy her and she apologized for her impatience.

As the time for the news approached, she put away her book and waited, anxious and concerned. The announcer said, "The Russians tanks were seen en masse on the streets of Budapest crushing the last vestige of resistance." I left the apartment quickly and went to get a newspaper so that I would have time to organize my thoughts before the child began to question.

When I returned, she asked, "Dad, why doesn't the U.N. intervene? Doesn't the United States have troops in Europe?"

I couldn't explain the failure of the other nations to react, and so I suggested that we discuss it later. But Edith wanted to know at once. I successfully avoided answering, and soon Verdi began to play on the radio and Edith returned to her reading.

At eight o'clock she got out of bed and read the Times for about twenty minutes. She was interested in a chess problem and made notes on her pad. At about nine, she asked her mother for eggs; no one ever offered her breakfast since she was free to ask for food when she was hungry. After she ate, she worked with her abacus. To take advantage of her interest, I dictated a column of four or five digit numbers for her to add.

"You are too slow, Dad." In about four minutes, I checked the sum and it was correct.

"You will never need an adding machine," I told her.

"Additions," she said "are baby stuff."

Later, while we walked along the Coney Island boardwalk, Edith engaged me in a discussion covering many aspects of international affairs, including the Hungarian problem. "Why don't the other satellites simultaneously stage a revolt? Russia certainly couldn't crush them all. Why does NATO keep quiet?"

We talked for about an hour, then went to the library, where she checked out four books about horses. When we got home, she began to read the books during lunch and by three-thirty had finished them. Since there was nothing else to do, we decided to walk back to the boardwalk. Over there, I attempted to explain to her the gravitational influence of the moon on the seas. Since I didn't know much about it myself, she was not satisfied with the explanation. "Why don't you get a book on it, Dad? Write a note to yourself so you will not forget." I did and two days later she had the book.

At home again, she called up my schoolmate who had promised to buy her a "visible man," a plastic model with removable parts.

"I'm sorry," said Joe. "I couldn't get to Manhattan."

"You're kidding me. They can be purchased in any store." Joe wouldn't visit again without the visible man. I mildly scolded her for calling him, but she shrugged it off with, "He promised. One should live up to his promises."

Edith chose not to eat supper that night, spending the rest

of the evening reading the *Times* and discussing with me the prospects for peace in the Middle East. "How can Israel be condemned for changing arid deserts into blooming gardens?" I had no answer.

At bedtime, as usual, "Could I read some more?"

"No," I said firmly. "The light will be turned off." Bedtime was one of the few rules that Edith knew at the age of four.

Already at that age, she had a remarkable memory. To test it, I once suggested that she observe the plates of passing cars while we were standing on the street corner. I wrote down the numbers of about twenty cars on my pad. Then we walked on and about an hour later I asked, "What do you remember about the cars?" To my surprise, she told me the license number of every one in the order in which they passed us. Then she reversed the order. Further, she described the color of each vehicle, but I had no way of verifying that since I had barely time to write down the license numbers. She was rewarded for her performance with an ice cream cone.

Before too long, Edith received the visible man from Joe. It showed the anatomy of a male in detachable plastic parts. Within two or three days she learned every organ and its function. During my next visit to the outpatient clinic for an examination, I told the physician about Edith's knowledge of anatomy. Having taught it at a medical school when he was younger, the doctor could not believe that a four-year-old child knew as much about the human body as I claimed. Finally I invited him to visit us to see for himself. The next Sunday he showed up at our apartment. I introduced him to Edith as my doctor.

"Where is his stethoscope?" she asked.

"What do you want it for?" the doctor responded.

"For once, I'd like to hear the abnormal beat of my Daddy's heart for myself."

"How would you know the difference?"

"I'll compare it with Mom's heart beat," she replied. "After all, her heart is normal."

The doctor quizzed Edith for some time. As he was leaving, he softly said to me, "You have a tremendous responsibility with that girl. I would be happy if my son who is eleven years older than Edith knew that much about anatomy." Within a week, a present for her arrived by mail from the doctor—an anatomy textbook.

At the age of four, she read the *Book of Prophets*. She loved it for its poetic beauty and social justice. "My child, this is the essence of Judaism, your faith—justice and charity are the same word in Hebrew."

"You mean they are synonymous."

"Yes, darling. Where did you hear this word?"

"You explained it to me after I heard it on the WQXR broadcast."

Edith recited the Twenty-Third Psalm with great conviction, which impressed me deeply. "I will fear no evil for Thou art with me." Isn't that beautiful?"

"It is, my child. I love it too."

"Why were the prophets so despised by the mighty?"

"Because they had the courage to oppose the unjust," I answered. "You must always help the needy and be just to others."

"I will, Daddy, all my life. Please read me *Isaiah*." She closed her eyes.

"Read it yourself. You do it so much better than I."

"But the words are difficult," she protested.

"You have learned it by heart," I reminded her.

"You are right, Daddy."

"Someday you will learn about the contemporary prophets."

"What is contemporary?" I explained the meaning of the word to her. "Please tell me who they are. I want to know all about them."

Soon, she learned about Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Ben Gurion, reading their biographies with great interest. "Daddy, I wish I could be big enough to help Schweitzer in his hospital in Africa."

"I hope that when you grow up, you will study medicine and heal the sick."

"Yes, Daddy. If I only could make you well."

"You will, my sweetheart."

When she was a little older, I took Edith to a Temple for the first time. She was disillusioned. "How can they please God with

prayer and songs? Why do we need such a beautiful structure? Wouldn't it be better to build hospitals in Africa? Why don't these people help the sick and poor? God would like it more. Why should people eat a lot before the Day of Atonement so that they are not hungry the next day—whom are they fooling? They cannot deceive God."

"Well," I responded, "Most of the adult people are not as smart as you are. Maybe they think they are deceiving God."

"Why did the Christians persecute the Jews? They, too, believe in the Old Testament."

"I don't know. It is a cruel world."

"We must make it better."

"I hope you will," I said sincerely.

"I will. I will, Daddy." Then she started questioning again. "Why do Christians fight among themselves? We Jews never would."

"We did it in the past, too."

"Why did Christian Germany fight Christian France?"

"The Nazis did not believe in God."

"How about the first World War?" Edith continued to probe. "Hitler was not in power then." She scored an important point. In World War I, priests in both France and Germany blessed troops in the name of the same God before they were sent to the front to kill each other.

On the way home she asked, "Why do the Whites chase Negroes from their church?" Again she had asked about the injustices of organized religion; I could offer no rational explanation.

"When you grow up, dear, I expect you to be good, helpful and kind," I told her. "This way you will serve God."

"You mean when you help man, you serve God?"

"That is exactly so, my child."

"Daddy, I wouldn't want to go to the Temple, to stand up when I am told, to sit down when I am ordered, and to sing when others sing."

There were many advantages to living in New York; it is an exciting city that is always bustling with action. Although I always

lacked funds, I saw to it that Edith participated in as many activities as possible. She learned early that the finest things in life are free. There were trips to the Bronx Zoo, to concerts at Levinson Stadium, to the Museum of Natural Science and of course, to the library. She particularly loved the Museum and it was often difficult to drag her out from it. "One more minute," she would insist as she disappeared into the crowd. Shortly she would return excited about what she had seen. "Daddy, there is so much one could learn from the past. I wish we could live nearby so I could come here everyday."

When Edith was five, we made a long planned visit to the United Nations. For weeks I had been explaining international relations to her and we had discussed the diversity of customs, traditions, and political systems which the United Nations represented. Edith, well aware of international conflicts, knew the role that the United Nations played in such situations. Once in discussing international relations, she said, "We shall either learn to live together or we shall perish." As this was my view also, I showed my approval by gently kissing her on the forehead.

As the day for the trip approached, she began to count the hours and the minutes—"seven days, fifteen hours, and five minutes." On the day of the trip, we got up quite early. I doubt that Edith had slept much for her eyes were red. After breakfast, we went to the subway station on Surf Avenue, where we had to climb about two stories or so to the platform. Knowing that it was hard for me, she cautioned me to slow up. Every so often she checked my pulse using her mother's watch which Edith was allowed to bring along on trips. "It's eighty-eight," she said. "You had better stop."

"What should a normal pulse be?" I asked.

"I guess sixty to seventy."

"How does a heart function?"

"It pumps blood." I was satisfied; there was no need to inquire further for there was a full day ahead of us.

As soon as we were on the train and my breathing became easier, I decided to take advantage of the hour's trip. "Edith, what powers the subway?" I asked without stopping to think that I didn't know the answer myself.

"Yes, what does? Where does it derive its energy?" She ran to

the first car to look out. Again she asked, "Where does the power come from?" But I couldn't answer.

I saw no way that the power could come through the two tracks. Since I was not going to try to bluff Edith, even though she was growing restless and even angry at the delay in finding out, I decided to ask some of the commuters. Many of them probably spent ten percent of their lives on subways, but none that I asked knew how the subway was powered. "How should I know? I ain't a mechanic," one replied.

Next, I asked the subway porter. Unable to tell us how the train ran, he looked at us with disbelief as though saying, "Why should anyone care about it?"

It became necessary to divert Edith's attention. "How many people does a car hold?" I asked.

"One hundred fifty," she quickly replied.

"There are twelve cars in the train. How many people can travel on this train?"

"That's easy—eighteen hundred."

"Each of them pays fifteen cents for his fare. How much money do they all spend for the trip when the train is full?"

This time it took her a little longer. "Two hundred seventy dollars. Daddy, where does the power come from?"

"Wait until we get off and we will find out."

When we arrived at Times Square Station, I asked Edith to find the phone number of the Transit Authority. Then I picked her up to a pay telephone, she deposited the coin and dialed. "Mister, who could tell me how the subway is powered?"

"What?" said the voice on the other end. I could picture his surprise. "Wait a moment."

Another man came on to the line. "Strange that people should ask about it." Then he explained about the conductor rail and how the electricity was transmitted to the electric locomotive. "Who are you, anyway?" he asked.

"Edith Stern," she replied. "Thank you." She was satisfied. I was also relieved and enlightened.

Our shuttle trip to the East side was uneventful, and soon we

were strolling toward the East River. "Edith," I asked, "does 42nd Street impress you?"

"You would think that the whole population of the city was here."

"How large is the population of the city?"

"I believe I read in the Times that it is eight million, seven hundred thousand," she replied.

I then called her attention to a woman walking by. "What kind of a dress does that lady wear?"

"It is a sari."

"Where are saris worn?"

"In India, of course."

"What is the name of the famous Indian leader who was assassinated?"

"Gandhi. I attended your lecture at which you spoke about his non-violent resistance to the British."

"Right, Edith. When did I deliver the lecture?"

"Seven days ago."

"You are right, Sweetheart. What was playing on the radio when we returned home after the lecture." I was testing her memory again.

"Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*."

"Why was your Mother worried then?"

"Because we came home so late. Where is your pad, Daddy?"

"I don't know. I must have left it in the subway."

"That's too bad. I want to draw a picture of this building."

Since I did not want to miss any opportunity for her self-expression, I went into a five-and-ten cent store and bought a pad. Soon Edith was blocking the normal flow of pedestrian traffic while sketching the *Daily News* building.

When we finally reached the United Nations, I was worn out, but not Edith. "What language is being spoken?" I asked as we sat and watched the General Assembly. "Is it Spanish or Italian?"

"Spanish." As usual, she was correct. "I'd like to learn the language."

"All you have to do is press the button and you will hear an English translation."

"That is too easy. You always tell me how important it is to learn—to learn all that we can."

I was very proud of her. "You're absolutely right, my darling."

"Somehow all these people seem to be at peace with each other. Why must we have wars? Why don't they settle all their differences right here and now?"

"They try to; perhaps someday they will, my dear."

"With the atomic bomb hanging over their head like a sword of Damocles?"

"What is a sword of Damocles?"

"Remember, you gave me the book on Greek mythology?"

"What was the name of the book?"

"Greek Mythology."

"You are right."

"Why do you tell me so often that I am right?" she asked.

On the way home on the subway, she fell asleep resting her head on my knee. As I looked at her peaceful face, I thought of the thousands of children who aimlessly roam the streets. If these children were properly educated, I thought, they could perhaps change the destiny of mankind.

## CHAPTER 8

### *A Genius On the Loose*

Edith developed an excellent vocabulary quite early and as a result frequently had trouble conversing with her playmates, who often teased and ridiculed her. She would try to even the score by using words that the other kids didn't understand. For example, she would say to a girl, "Your epidermis is showing"—a phrase which later became popular among older children. Similarly, she would tell a child, "You betray narcissistic tendencies," an expression which she had borrowed from Freud. Assuming that these words were bad the children often complained to their mothers, who in turn criticized me about her abusive language.

Having accepted a position in Rock Island, Illinois, in the fall of 1957, I moved my family there. Our neighbor, a Christian, invited Edith to spend Christmas morning with his children. Being Jewish she was not sure that she should go. Explaining that while there is a diversity of traditions and holidays among the many religions, they have a common belief in God and justice, I urged her to go. She agreed and on Christmas morning, she was with the neighbor's children excitedly viewing the presents under the tree.

The father, who passed out the presents, handed one to Edith. Unaccustomed to the Christmas tradition, she asked what it was. He told her to unwrap it and inside she found a pair of pajamas. Delighted, she asked who gave them to her. In the best American tradition, the father replied, "They are from Santa Claus."

"But there is no Santa Claus," she protested. "He is simply a myth."

"Of course there is," the little neighbor girl said, coming to

her father's aid. "He comes down the chimney every Christmas to bring us toys."

"No. There is no Santa Claus," Edith persisted.

"Daddy, is it true? Explain it to Edith."

Embarrassed, the father reassured the children that there was a Santa Claus. "Edith, you must be mistaken. You simply never saw him."

I beg to differ with you, Sir Saint Nicholas is commemorated by the Christians, but Christmas signifies the birth of Jesus Christ."

The other children were upset. "Daddy, is there really no Santa Claus?" Again he assured them there was, at which point Edith left the house crying and walked the mile to home. When I asked her what had happened, she told me the story, then added, "I left because I realized that the truth can be so painful."

One of Edith's favorite television programs was "*The \$64,000 Question*." Prior to its going off the air in the summer of 1958, Edith was probably its most avid fan. At the end of each show, when the successful contestant was invited to return the following week, he was assigned a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and told to study it. The following day Edith would begin to read the assigned volume from beginning to end, eagerly anticipating the next week's show. On the day of the program, she would wake up early and nervously count the hours. When, the show began, the rest of the family had to be quiet, while one by one she correctly answered every questions. At later events revealed, Edith was perhaps the only one who had the right answers for the show was rigged.

In addition to her intellectual feats, Edith often showed a sense of fairness uncommon to children or even adults. Shortly after her sixth birthday—which she dismissed as just chronology and refused to celebrate—we rode a streetcar to a movie theater. As we squeezed onto the crowded car, I paid my fare and we found a seat in the back.

"Daddy, you should have paid half a fare for me," she reminded me.

"I had forgotten that you are now six, but let's forget it."

A few minutes passed and Edith said, "Give me a nickel."

"What do you need it for?" She wouldn't tell me, so not having a nickel, I eventually gave her a dime.

In a few minutes, she disappeared to the front of the streetcar mumbling something about wanting to see the road ahead. Later, as we were leaving the streetcar, the driver said to me, "You have a funny girl." When I asked why, he explained that she had insisted on paying. "I told her that little girls can ride the streetcars free, but she said that she was six. Then she gave me ten cents explaining that five cents was for her fare and five for a penalty since her father hadn't paid for her." Then he said, "You must give her a lot of dough."

"No my good man, it is simple honesty which we adults lack so badly," I said, somewhat embarrassed.

"You said it, not me," agreed the driver.

On another occasion, Bella had gone out of town to visit a friend. As we were leaving the library one afternoon, Edith said, "lets call Mother." I suggested that we wait until the rates went down in the evening, but she insisted, explaining that since her mother would be visiting later we would not be able to reach her. I finally agreed and we found a public telephone. At the completion of the call, I hung up the receiver and a dime was returned. Since I had deposited the correct change, the dime must have been returned by mistake. Without giving it much thought, I put it in my pocket.

"Daddy, you should have redeposited the dime. It belongs to the telephone company."

I agreed with her, but I explained that the first person to use the phone would get it rather than the telephone company. "How would you suggest that I return it," I asked.

"Let me think about it."

The next day she wrote the following note to the telephone company:

Dear Sir:

Enclosed find a dime which belongs to you. My Dad and I used the telephone yesterday and on completion of our conversation a dime came back. Make sure that you repair your installation at this address:

She neatly printed the location of the telephone booth.

"Daddy, put the dime in the envelope and mail it." I did.

By late summer of 1958, I decided to spend as much time as possible completing my book. Hence, I happily accepted a school principalship in Florida which paid poorly but which would permit me to devote a great deal of time to writing. Further, my doctor had told me that the Florida climate would be ideal for both Edith's and my health.

Soon we were living in Saint Petersburg, where Edith started first grade at the normal age of six. Although she had been ready for several years, she did not start earlier because I was not very eager to have her in school. In fact, the only reason she attended at all was because the state laws required it. As I had feared, her school experiences that fall were uneventful and boring.

During this period, my wife and I frequently argued over Edith's future. Bella's philosophy was fatalistic. "Let her pursue studies with her age group," she said. "Surely schools are competent to educate pupils. Happiness is the supreme goal of people and one cannot attain it in seclusion." Our friends and relatives strengthened her position. The situation became unbearable to Bella as I depended more and more on my daughter for companionship, intellectual stimulation, and recreation. I could not convince her that my method of total submersion was crucial to Edith's upbringing.

We continued to discuss peaceful solutions to our dilemma, but I insisted that under all circumstances, Edith would remain in my custody. I argued that her separation from me as her teacher would cause incalculable harm to her progress. Having no solution, we settled on an uneasy truce.

In spite of the conflicts, I continued my work with Edith, who by now was teaching me as well as I was teaching her. We discussed philosophy, sociology, history, and political science. On her own, she intensively studied Gestalt psychology, a subject which she was to continue in a more general way several years later in junior college.

She still attended my lectures, where she was alert, responsive and inquisitive. If she wanted to make a point or ask a question, she did not hesitate to interrupt me, which often annoyed my students. Once I was lecturing on Darwin's theory of evolution, she suddenly interrupted me to ask, "How do you reconcile Darwin's theory with the Biblical explanation of the origin of man?" She had clearly seen the conflict between the two accounts of the genesis.

Later that year we moved to North Miami Beach where I asked

the school to permit Edith to skip a grade so that she would not be so bored. In consideration of the request, they gave Edith a day long battery of psychological examinations to determine her readiness to advance. At the time, Edith still wanted a dog and to punish me because she didn't have one, she cunningly answered every question with the word dog. As a result, my request was denied. However, a few months later she was permitted to skip ahead anyway. This however did not decrease her boredom.

During the summer of 1959, we had a picnic in Crandon Park on Key Biscayne. While Edith swam in the bay, Bella asked me to walk along the beach with her. "I have something to tell that may displease you," she said.

"Nothing can shock me. What is it?"

"I am going to have a baby."

I was pleased and embraced her warmly. Then, I said that the world would have another superior human being. "No!" she protested. "This will be my own, totally my own, child!" The inevitable argument followed. "All you are interested in is experimentation with no regard for your child's welfare," she charged.

I angrily replied, "Is not every parent determined to provide the best educational facilities for his offspring? Did not illiterate immigrants slave in sweatshops for eighty hours a week so that their children could advance themselves? Well I do exactly the same, but more intensely, with more vigor and dedication. Doesn't Edith lead a happy and wholesome life while, in my judgment, she is destined to make a substantial contribution to the world of science? What can be more noble? The argument subsided. Perhaps the gap had grown deeper.

As I had encouraged Edith from the time I put black and white dolls in her crib as an infant, she developed a keen sense of justice and equality in the brotherhood of man. As I did, she believed every person, regardless of race or ethnic origin, should receive the same treatment and consideration as anyone else.

In 1959, the landmark Supreme Court decision of five years earlier appeared to be another dead letter of the law. The token school desegregation efforts signified window dressing at best. An editorial in a leading newspaper poignantly summed up the situation with, "At the present rate, it will take approximately two thousand years to bring about a total school integration." The Negro community, disillusioned with the slow progress, became bitter and frustrated, and the racial polarization increased.

In the fall of that year, I was asked to address a gathering of Negro educators. While I accepted, I did so realizing that the assignment required tact, courage and sincerity. Thus, when Edith asked to join me at the lecture, I was hesitant. "Are you aware, my child, that in spite of my record of liberalism, the audience might be hostile to me for no other reason but that I am a white person?"

"Do not worry, Daddy. I am fully aware of it." Reluctantly, I consented.

The following day at the library, she disappeared into one of the many rooms, soon to emerge smiling and tightly holding her worn-out notebook. She was evasive when I asked where she had been and what she had been doing.

At the lecture, the church hall was filled to capacity. Edith and I were the only white people present. I was politely, but coolly introduced. I told the educators that a struggle still lay ahead, a struggle which they would have to pursue in alliance with an enlightened segment of the white community. I concluded, "No one can set back the clock of history. Justice will prevail."

A barrage of angry questions followed. "How long can we wait?" "How can you explain the delay to children who will be inferior tomorrow because they are not given adequate education today?" "Why shouldn't morality transcend political expediencies?" These were grievances which had burdened me. I had no easy answers and the crowd continued to be indignant.

During the lecture and the questions, Edith had sat by me quietly. Now she jolted my arm and with a twinkle in her eye, asked that I let her speak. Fearful that the audience would misinterpret my action by having a seven-year-old child address them, I nevertheless introduced her. "Ladies and gentlemen, I should like to present my daughter who has a few words to say." At first, the reaction was unfavorable, but gradually calmness was restored as Edith resolutely climbed on a chair.

She opened her notebook and in a loud voice read, "How untrustworthy, filthy, easily given to alcohol they are, indeed they must go back to . . ." She paused. Deathly silence reigned in the hall, while my heart succumbed to an uncontrollable fibrillation. Then she slowly repeated, "Indeed they must go back to Ireland where they came from." Quoted from a letter to the *Boston Globe*, 1880." A thunder of applause filled the hall. Tears moistened my eyes as I warmly embraced her.

At home that evening, Edith said, "Remember, Dad, the stories you told me about the plight of the Irish who had to flee their homeland because of famine and the oppression which they suffered upon their arrival in America? Well I have never forgotten the story and I found a book at the library where that letter was printed. I think the Negro problem is quite similar.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to quote the letter before we went to the lecture?"

"Surprise is the most effective weapon," she whispered and walked away smiling.

At Thanksgiving, Edith was to play the part of an Indian in a skit. Waiting to drive her home one day, I overheard her arguing with the teacher about the "unsophisticated language" of the script. "It would appear to me," she said, "that second graders should possess more semantic finesse." Then she criticized the script for being "historically inaccurate" pointing out, "As everyone knows, the Indians were brutally slaughtered by the white men in their desire to take possession of the native's land." Finally, she concluded, "I refuse to participate in the show because of the historical inaccuracies and its poor articulation."

Reluctantly she was persuaded to play her part. As the parents watched, the children acted out the first Thanksgiving. Finally Edith appeared on stage as an Indian bearing fruit to the Pilgrims. "This is a token of our friendship. We Indians hope to live harmoniously with you in mutual respect," she ad libbed to a surprised little pilgrim. The girl playing the part, confused by this departure from the script, forgot her lines and left the stage in tears. As the curtain went down, I was summoned to the stage.

"How could you do it?" I asked. "You scared the poor little girl and have upset the play."

"Daddy, I simply did it for historical accuracy. I wanted to set the record straight," she replied. When I reminded her that it was only a play, she countered with, "A play which should have been based on historical facts!" I could have pointed out that in terms of historical accuracy, the Indian would have been unlikely to use the words which she did, but I saw no point in arguing further.

Realizing the embarrassment she had caused, Edith apologized to the little girl. "There was no premeditation on my part. It just happened impulsively."

"I don't understand you, Edith," the girl complained.

At other times, her verbal ability proved to be an asset. One day I was driving with her from Fort Lauderdale to Miami. As I was leaving Broward county, I hastily turned on a yellow light. Minutes later I was pulled to the side of the road by a police car. The patrolman insisted that I had run the light and in spite of my protests began to write out a ticket. Edith, who had been sitting quietly, turned to the officer and said, "I don't think my Dad violated the traffic law. He turned on yellow as every prudent driver would do when a car is pursuing him closely at an unreasonable speed. However, this is totally irrelevant in this case."

"Why is it irrelevant?" the officer inquired.

"Well as a Broward County officer, you must be aware that Dade County is not within your jurisdiction. We shall prove it in court."

"Good Lord," he exclaimed, "what kind of a child is she?"

"She is not a child, but an adult midget," I replied.

The officer let me off without a ticket, stating, "I am not going to face her in court."

At home, Bella asked me why I was so pale. "Mommie, I rescued Daddy from a traffic ticket on technical grounds," Edith proudly told her.

A few weeks later, while traveling to the library to work on my manuscript, I was arrested on a false charge of a minor traffic violation. The belligerent officer, in spite of my protests of innocence, took me to jail, refusing to let me either lock my car or take along the only copy of my manuscript. When I was released by a judge a couple of hours later, the manuscript, including my priceless interviews with Einstein, was gone. It had been my life's work for many years. Its loss was a shattering blow.

Apparently Nazi sympathizers were involved in the theft, for shortly afterwards we began to receive threatening phone calls. On several occasions our home was shot at from swiftly passing cars. The loss of the book plus the threats were devastating. My health rapidly failed to the point where I could no longer discharge my responsibilities as a school administrator.

Calm and courageous in the face of these adversities, Bella, without awakening me, called a taxi during the night of February 2, 1960, when her labor pains began. This was a repeat performance

of Edith's birth; again she feared that the excitement might cause me to have a heart spasm. The next morning, I learned that I was the father of a seven-pound boy. We named him David.

David came home from the hospital to a house resounding with music. Our bitter struggle over how he should be reared was resolved in a rather tragic way for soon I became too disabled to work. Consequently, Bella had to work to supplement my meager disability pension, leaving me at home to care for David. I now had another child to mold.

## CHAPTER 9

### *Not All is Honey*

In 1960 we moved to Indiana where I served as a director of education and as an assistant to the rabbi of a Reform Temple. Life had become difficult in Florida after the loss of my manuscript and the harrassment which followed. Thus we felt that we should leave, although we were not particularly pleased about moving to Indiana. The air in this town was polluted from industrial chimneys and the people were stiff, formal and withdrawn. When I defended the record of the United Nations in a lecture, I was met with indignation. When I suggested that it might be safer to have China admitted to the United Nations rather than to have her causing trouble on the outside, I was regarded as having committed treason.

This was a town which saw a substantial part of its population in church on Sunday for that was a sign of respectability rather than an expression of faith. The small Jewish community, mainly descendants of German emigrants, had no less than three houses of worship and on any given day you could seat all the Jewish population in any one of the sanctuaries and still have room for more. But as Christian denominations had their respective churches, so did all three Jewish denominations—it was the respectable thing to do. When one denomination built a new synagogue, the other denominations had to do the same thing. To fortify their respectability, many of the Jews were members of two different denominational synagogues. The Board of Welfare, encompassing the whole Jewish population, had a full time director, but there were few needy Jews. Once a suggestion was made that an old age home be built, but the idea was dropped when not a single applicant could be found.

As one of my duties, I conducted lectures at the temple on the foundations of Judaism to groups of laity and Christian theology students. Edith was always present. Once, a student asked about the similarities of Judaism and Christianity which he referred to as the Judeo-Christian tradition. After raising her hand for recognition, Edith inquired, "How do you reconcile the Spanish Inquisition and brutal persecution of Jews in Christian Europe with this statement." There was nothing which I could add.

About the same time, Edith read *Crime and Punishment*. "Dad, the transition from Tolstoy to Dostoevski is like going from a sunlit valley to the gloomy darkness of despair."

"I had cautioned you not to read Dostoevski for that reason."

"In spite of it, I am fascinated by his treatment of crime and atonement. How would you define justice?"

Using religion as a frame of reference, I explained that the basis of Judaism was justice for the sake of goodness and inner satisfaction.

"You still did not tell me what justice means."

"Well, perhaps the following will help. Tzedaka in Hebrew means both justice and mercy since one is inseparable from the other."

"You put it on a philosophical plateau."

"Well, not to be abstract, justice means to treat people as you would like to be treated by them. It means to purge your heart of bigotry, prejudice and greed and to maintain impartiality. Further, it means to be truthful at all times."

She pressed me for an example. "Your friendship with Elizabeth who is a Negro while the other kids resent her is an act of justice. The care you give to library books, the errands you do for the old lady, the research you do to ascertain the truth—all these are acts of justice."

"You are saying one should be just for the sake of justice, not out of fear of penalty nor for the sake of rewards," she observed.

"Right. Further, just as a good deed should result in inner satisfaction, an act of injustice will burden your conscience. Therefore, the Jew cannot accept the premise that Christ, by his death, atoned for the sins of all people. Rather everyone must be responsible for his own deeds. For example, every faithful Catholic confesses his sins and the Father confessor then metes out some sort of penalty

This relieves the believer of his guilt. On the other hand the Jews have no easy solution to moral problems; we believe that there is no mediator between God and man. A rabbi is just a teacher."

"Daddy, take me to see a confession." I explained that as a Jew I could not confess and that it would be improper for her to listen to someone else confess. She was insistent.

"But confessions are conducted in strict privacy," I told her. "How would you have access to one? In fact the priest is sworn to secrecy. I cannot take you to a confession, but I think I know a way you can visit a Catholic church. Marty, our custodian, is a Catholic. Perhaps you can persuade him to take you to church."

Marty, who had not been to church for years, was flabbergasted when Edith asked that he take her there, but after much protesting, he finally agreed to go sometime in the near future. During the days that she waited, she read about the origin and history of confession. One day Marty showed up and said, "Let's go to the Cathedral."

I had requested that he bring her right back to my office, but several hours passed before they returned. When they arrived, Edith, her face pale, ran into my arms. "What happened to you two," I asked. Marty explained that she had got away from him in the church. When she came back she acted nervous and uneasy. Then she refused to come home saying that she had been dishonest and was ashamed.

Marty left and I offered to buy Edith an ice cream cone. She refused it, saying she had been unjust and didn't deserve it. "In the Cathedral, I left Marty and found the confessional booths. I crawled under the curtain and entered unnoticed. Then I heard a man saying, 'I have been disloyal to my wife and abusive to my children.' The priest ordered, 'Say eight Holy Marys, attend church regularly, say the Prayer of Contrition, make a donation in the poor box, and make peace with God, my son.' Daddy I have been so unjust and dishonest. How can I clear my conscience?"

For punishment, I forbade her to go to the library for three days. She agreed that that was a proper punishment.

Unhappy with Indiana, we moved later that year to Far Rockaway on Long Island. Edith now had to apply for admission at an old dilapidated school where we had to convince the principal that at the age of eight, she should be put in the fourth grade. Although the Board of Education booklet suggested that school was an

exciting experience to the child, she asked, "Daddy, must I go to school? It will be boring again."

As I had done many times before, I explained that the law requires children to attend school until they are sixteen.

"But I learn nothing there. Why must I go to school and waste my time? I would be much happier at home where I can listen to music, read, and discuss with you."

"Edith, you are right, but there is nothing we can do. Perhaps they will place you in a school for gifted children."

At the school, I asked the woman in the office if I could register my child.

"How old is she?"

"Eight."

"What grade did she attend in Indiana?"

"Fourth."

"You will have to see the principal. There are no eight-year-old children in the fourth grade here."

When I asked if there were any schools for gifted children in the area, she told me we would have to commute into the city. "Oh, that is awful," I said.

"Mister, we have not yet established that she requires a school for gifted children."

I pointed to Edith who sat quietly reading the *New York Times*. "Isn't that a sufficient proof of her intelligence?" "Indeed, no," she answered. Then I went to see the principal, who, after much persuasion, assured me they would put her in the fourth grade, commenting, "she would find enough of a challenge there." Edith resignedly entered the fourth-grade classroom as I left.

A few hours later, she was home. When I asked her how school was, she said, "Miserable, don't ask. I won't tell you." I felt guilty for having taken her there.

Visiting the school a few days later, I inquired how Edith was doing. The teacher informed me that she was not doing well and that she did not do her homework. Then she added, "You must see that she reads at home."

"Yes, I will prompt her to read at home," I said sarcastically.

In 1960 I embarked on a lecture tour of Europe. En route home in October, I suffered a prolonged heart spasm and was taken to a hospital in an ambulance.

Since children are not granted visiting privileges, Edith was not permitted to see me. After a few days, however, I insisted that she be allowed to visit. I told the hospital officials that my recovery depended upon it since otherwise I would have my wife take me home. Finally the hospital administrator agreed to make an exception if Edith would confine herself to the wing I was in and if she was accompanied by an adult. I readily accepted these restrictions for I was anxious to see her.

Several doctors and interns were in my room making the morning rounds when Bella brought Edith in for her visit. After entering the room, she immediately asked my doctor, "What are the statistical chances for my Dad's survival? Has he had a myocardial infarction?" Astonished, the doctor asked her what a myocardial infarction was. She explained the disorder in great detail.

While I was hospitalized, Edith spent many hours at my bedside telling me about the books she had read on physiology, cardiology, and pharmacology in order "to be of as much assistance to you as I can during your hospitalization." She also gained some first hand knowledge of medicine during her visits. Because the Chief of Medicine took an interest in her, he often permitted her to follow him on his daily rounds with the interns and medical students. He explained that her presence was useful since it kept the students alert and humble.

As my stay continued, Edith became increasingly knowledgeable about medicine and medical terms. Once she asked a technician to let her check my EKG. "I would like to see the prominence and frequency of the P waves on my Dad's tracing," she told him.

"She must be kidding me, Mr. Stern," the man responded.

One day, Edith seemed depressed when she came into my room. I asked her why she was so sad. "You receive so much digitalis. At times digitalis can be harmful to people."

Since I always took Edith seriously, I asked my doctor about it. "Doc, why am I getting so much digitalis?"

"To keep you alive."

"But too much can be harmful."

"Yes, it can be fatal, but don't worry, we are watching you carefully for reactions. Anyway, I told you not to read medical books." When I insisted that I hadn't been reading medical books, he assumed that I had gotten the information from an intern. I assured him that my source of information was outside the hospital.

Edith was fascinated by pathology. Having obtained permission, Bella took her to the pathology department. "Dad, how thrilling it is that a slight variation in the color of a biopsy determines the difference between life and death, whether a growth is benign or malignant. How great the responsibility of the pathologist is. This man alone has to make the critical decisions in the struggle with disease during surgery.

One morning a middle aged man was wheeled into my room with an acute pain in his shoulders. The agony was clearly reflected in his face. While the nurses undressed and put him into bed, they asked Edith and his wife to leave the room. When they returned, the woman was holding Edith's hand. "What a girl you have," she told me. "What a doll! How compassionate." Then she began to cry. After assuring her everything would be all right, I asked Edith what had happened while they were out of the room.

"Well Daddy, the lady briefed me on her husband's symptoms. The persistent pain in his chest has lasted a few days and she thinks it is due to a coronary. I simply assured her that there could be any number of reasons for the pain such as muscular cramps or some other lesion."

I asked her, "What do you base your diagnosis on?"

"First of all," she replied, "I state this hypothetically. As you know, I follow the doctor on his rounds. There is a patient in the last ward who suffered from a similar discomfort. After all of the tests were made, they revealed bursitis in the shoulder."

It turned out that Edith was right; my roommate did not have a coronary. Rather the pains were attributed to psychogenic factors, apparently because he had taken a severe loss on the stock market a few days before. He was discharged about four days later.

As he and his wife were leaving, she said, "Here is a present for my little doctor." Kissing Edith on the head, she handed her a copy of Exodus. "Please read it. My Joe sailed on the ship."

To this day she sends us clippings about Edith. "Make sure you study medicine," was written in one accompanying note. I hope that the woman was not too disappointed when she later learned that Edith had chosen to become a mathematician.

It was mid-December before I was released from the hospital and even then I was so weak that I could hardly walk. I'd had the attacks before, but they never had been so incapacitating. Thus, we were compelled to move back to Florida for the climatic advantages. Edith, who was always looking for a way to avoid having to attend school, greeted the decision to move nonchalantly. "I'll be happy wherever we live." Then upon reflection, she added, "Great! Maybe Florida laws don't compel school attendance." I assured her that she would be required to attend school.

We gave away our few meager pieces of furniture and packed the rest of our belongings. Then for two nights before we left, we stayed with my friend Leon in Little Neck. He drove us to his house where we had dinner and talked about our childhood in Europe. Another friend stopped in to say good-bye. Then to test my ability to stand for a while, I suggested we go down to the basement and play billiards.

Suddenly Edith asked me to take her to the Museum. "How can I?" It is so far and after all I am sick.

"Please let me see the Museum for the last time," she begged. "I can't go alone and Mother must stay with the baby."

"Let me reason with you, my child."

"I must go!" she shouted angrily.

After telling her no again, I went down to the basement. After the game, Leon went upstairs to complete a speech draft. My other friend remained to chat for a while, then he also left. Alone in the basement, I heard someone suddenly lock the door and run. "Open the door, Edith," I shouted. There was no reply. My screams remained unanswered because upstairs the television was loudly playing. Since I was wearing only a light jacket, I was freezing in the cold basement. I became weaker and weaker. An hour passed and I was having difficulty walking to keep warm. I thought that this was the end.

Leon and Bella had thought that I had gone for a ride with the friend who had left while Edith had gone to Leon's library where she was reading Greek mythology. She later claimed that she had forgotten I was in the basement.

Finally, using my last strength, I screamed as loud as I could. Hearing this, the dogs began to bark. Michael, Leon's son, ran down and released me. "He is frozen," Michael told the others as he helped me up the stairs. As I was put to bed, a doctor was called. Shortly, Edith appeared in the door.

"Daddy, what have I done?"

I assured her that I would be fine, but Leon was unable to control his anger. "Your own daughter locked you up—the child for whom you sacrifice your life." Ashamed and frightened, Edith left the room.

"Leon don't touch her. She is a genius. Don't scare her. Don't harm her."

"A genius, my foot! So she reads the Times, so she plays chess. How could she do it to you, her father? Or for that matter to any human being?"

His wife appeared in the door and listened to the account of the event. In her heavy Polish accent, she exclaimed, "How crazy you are. Everything is unique with you. You deal with not one but two or three hospitals. You change three residences a year. Your child must be no less than a genius. How about David? Is he a genius too?"

"Yes, dear, he is destined to become one."

# CHAPTER 10

## *Another Star*

My work with David, as with Edith, had begun at birth. He too was reading before the age of two. We bought a house in North Miami Beach a short while before his second birthday. The real estate agent drove us to the location avoiding the railroad tracks which were three blocks away and which do not enhance the value of the property to say the least. Unaware of the tracks, I agreed to buy the house. While the negotiations were in progress, David heard a train passing in the distance and called it to my attention. The price of the house was lowered by \$700 immediately.

In some respects, David was superior to Edith, for while his head was in the clouds, his feet were firmly planted on the ground. He possessed a remarkable ability for adapting himself to his environment. At the age of three, he would play on the beach with another child, but as soon as his playmate was taken home, he might open up *Robinson Crusoe* and read aloud or add numbers in the sand. He would play cowboys and Indians with the neighborhood children, then scold them for "depicting Indians always as culprits as the TV does, which is historically incorrect."

In 1963 I made acquaintance with a securities exchange broker, and David and I began daily visits to his office where I could discuss literature, theology, and current events with him. Blonde, blue-eyed, handsome David soon became the mascot of the office. Realizing that the brokerage office could provide an excellent vehicle for David's education, I encouraged him to learn about stock transactions. Tape watchers began to ask him to check the quotes of their favorite stocks. He would read the ticker tape, then courteously and accurately report the information.

Before long, he had memorized at least one hundred fifty stock

symbols. He followed their trade with great excitement, making such comments as "Here we go again. IBM is losing its bottom." The stock market also helped him to learn simple fractions. By three and a half, he knew the difference between the meaning of CH 60½ and CH 60¾. Additionally, he kept his eye on the Dow Jones tape, which helped him to read more fluently. He would draw other people's attention to the tape when it had stories in which he thought they would be interested.

"Mr. Jones, Chrysler car output dropped during the last ten day period." He knew that Mr. Jones owned a substantial block of Chrysler shares.

As David became skillful in the dynamics of the stock market, he began to form opinions about certain stocks, some of which were surprisingly accurate. People would ask him, half seriously, what they should buy. "Coca Cola or S.R.T. There are rumors about a takeover of S.R.T.," he replied one time.

In 1963, when President Kennedy addressed an airport rally in Miami, I asked the children if they wanted to hear him speak. They thought it was an excellent idea. I had Edith excused from school, and on our way to the airport we bought a bouquet of flowers. At the rally, David gave the flowers to a Secret Service man at the fence saying, "This is for the President from Edith, Daddy, and myself." Edith and David still cherish that glimpse of the charismatic President. A few days later, David was the first one to report to me the sad news, tearfully. "Daddy, President Kennedy was shot."

On weekends, as my health permitted, we visited various places in the community. David particularly enjoyed our trips to the airport where he was once allowed to enter the cockpit of a jet. On a visit to a destroyer docked in Port Everglades, he had the tour guide explain the range of a cannon. During the same visit, he told a group of sailors, "The only thing you must be missing is girls. There aren't any." The sailors applauded him warmly and one assured him that was their main complaint.

Edith during this time continued to be bored in school. She had entered junior high school that year, and now was no longer permitted to skip grades as she had done in elementary school. She told me, "Daddy, you know, I have developed a defense mechanism which enables me to disassociate myself totally from whatever happens in the classroom, yet I do nothing that would offend the teacher." I came to have the distinction of being the parent most despised by the school authorities, because, dissatis-

fied with the inadequacies of the school system, I continually demanded more work for Edith.

The child told me that my frequent visits to school "put terror in the heart of the teachers."

In spite of the boredom at school, Edith's junior high school days were a period of great intellectual growth. Her thirst for knowledge was insatiable, covering every branch of the arts and sciences. We would discuss and debate jurisprudence, semantics and philosophy. In jurisprudence the starting point was now the Code of Hammurabi and she demanded that I translate the Hebrew Talmud. As her mentor, I had to devote many hours to research in order to discuss these topics with her intelligently. Bella would sometimes good naturedly tease me about my efforts. "Stay-ing up late studying again? Have you not reversed your roles? This is the price you have to pay for your genius manufacturing."

I replied, "This is my most gratifying experience."

Not everything was academic study, however. She still enjoyed music, and she took violin lessons. I'm sure the neighbors would have preferred that she had taken up knitting instead. "Don't you have any homework?" a neighbor once asked her as she practiced. Even I would sometimes plead with her to quit practicing for the day.

"What is the matter, Daddy? Can't you take it? How about me? I also like fine music but I'm forced to listen to my own cacophony." In the end, she became an accomplished violinist.

I had taught Edith to play chess when she was three, and we often played. David would watch us. One day he said, "How about playing a game with me?"

"Who taught you the game, David?"

"No one. I just watched you."

Two years later, by the time he was six, he regularly defeated me.

While Edith shied away from physical activities--she once said of physical education, "If I cannot exercise my brain at school, at least I can exercise my body"--she was not particularly athletic. David, however, was quite athletic; my educational work with him did not hinder his physical development. He played ball and occasionally exchanged a black eye with a playmate. "It was self-defense," he maintained. "It is the survival of the fittest. I was attacked."

In junior high school, Edith tried to cultivate friendships with her classmates, but it was often difficult. For example, a girl might be invited home for dinner. Sooner or later, Edith would invite her into her bedroom, which was stacked to the ceiling with books. These alone were usually enough to dampen the relationship, then the girl would inspect Edith's closet. "Are these the only dresses you have?"

"How many do I need?"

"By the way, there is a sale at Lerner's."

"I really don't care about it. I can wear these for another year or two," Edith replied. She had very little in common with the other children.

Usually before a test, Edith's popularity would increase. Her classmates would call her on the telephone. However, she could not always offer assistance because she cared little what happened in class, and seldom opened a textbook. Once she said, "Dad, as I sit in the class observing the other students, I find that many of them have greater potential than I do, yet they are destined to drown in the sea of mediocrity, without incentive and guidance. For example, take Helen. She grasps concepts instantly, but she has no desire to explore further. Why should she? She had straight A's which is all that society, her parents, and the school expect of her."

At school, Edith occasionally grew irritated, and deliberately tried to embarrass the teacher. She might cite a passage from some noted author with whom the teacher was unfamiliar. Once in social science class she quoted from a book by Erich Fromm to make a point. The teacher's lack of knowledge was at once clear. At the end of the class period, Edith told her instructor how sorry she was and that she wouldn't do it again. Then for weeks she lapsed back into her nonchalant attitude, in which, like a prisoner in a penitentiary, she marked the passing days on the calendar.

Having the advantage of being Jewish, she was delighted with the privilege of being able to observe both Jewish and Christian holidays. "Thank God, the holidays are coming," she would exclaim:

Sometimes she would urge me to stop paying my school taxes on the ground that the schools are a total waste.

"I would be subject to a legal suit and I don't have the funds to go to court."

"All you have to do is to subpoena me as a witness."

"I'm afraid it isn't that simple."

"What about me? You are being taxed financially while I am being subjected to this unproductive experience daily."

I continued to make frequent trips to the school and thus maintained my reputation as a "nuisance." "We have far brighter students than Edith," the principal told me. "If there is enough challenge for them, why should you complain?"

"I have no doubt that there are brighter children than my daughter, but the point is they are not sufficiently motivated. On the other hand, Edith is."

"You are pushing her too hard. We are interested in developing the totality of the student's personality."

"What a cliché."

"Good day, Mr. Stern. There is nothing we can do for Edith. Next time send her mother instead. She appears to be a more reasonable person."

At home, I had to tell Edith that I was unsuccessful again. She would not be able to take advanced work, or a language course, or a science course. Philosophically, she responded, "This too, shall pass."

Meanwhile, my visits to the school brought ridicule from her classmates. "Your father was at the school again. Perhaps if you had a boyfriend, you would be less bored, prima donna."

"You are not doing too hot in classes anyway," suggested her neighbor.

"Indeed, I don't do well," Edith replied.

The parents of other children also criticized me. "Mr. Stern, you are obsessed with education as if it were the supreme goal of a human being. My son regards the school as too tough. He has trouble finding enough time to pursue his other activities."

"What are they?"

"Football. Baseball."

"I'm sorry. Edith does not indulge in these activities."

"How about cooking, sewing, and cleaning?"

There was not need to reply. When I told Edith about the conversation, she was really upset, particularly since she regarded such activities to be prime examples of how society has tried to subjugate women.

Two years later the boy dropped out of high school and took a job pumping gas in a service station. When Edith is home on vacation, she always urges me not to stop there. "I don't want to embarrass the poor kid. He is such a bright boy. It is a shame he didn't finish school."

Edith always knew the exact location of each book in her library, which numbered in the thousands, including a new *Encyclopaedia Britannica* presented to her by the publisher, but at the end of the school year, she could never find her textbooks. "Edith, please find your books or I will have to pay a fine," I would beg.

"Believe me, Daddy, it isn't deliberate. Perhaps, I subconsciously lost them out of resentment."

"But you love books."

"Of course I do, but these symbolize the school." Eventually Bella came to her aid and found the books.

Once I was shocked to learn that the geography text which was used in Edith's junior high class contained a map showing all of Africa still as English and French colonies except for the Union of South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia. The nations which had gained independence in the fifties were not shown. In response to my complaints, the principal told me funds were not available to buy newer textbooks. As I inquired further, I found that this situation prevailed throughout most of Florida.

I thought that perhaps I could help the situation by publicizing it. However, at about the same time Edith was told she must take a course in home economics before she could graduate from Junior High. While we were unhappy with the mediocrity of the schools in general, there was no area which upset us as much as home economics. Edith was not the least interested in learning to cook and sew, while I thought that it was a waste of taxpayers' money to teach domestic skills at school, especially since the academic subjects were so inadequate. I visited the home economics class, where I viewed the elaborate display of new washing machines, ovens, and other kitchen paraphernalia. I asked the teacher if all of that equipment was expensive. "Yes," she replied, "You are looking at some of the finest home economics

equipment in the country. It costs many thousands of dollars," she said with pride.

I was outraged. Fighting to control my anger, as I went to the principal and told him, "We spend millions to teach girls to cook and wash clothes, things which every girl is exposed to at home from infancy, while we deceive them in a vital content area such as geography. This is cruel and tragic. What a price we will pay in the future for our neglect. It would seem to me that this is the only country in the world where academic credits are granted for such non-academic subjects. This is the only country that spends public education funds for washing machines."

Edith was now twelve years old and in the ninth grade. I was determined that I would put an end to her public school education, since I was sure that the remaining three years of high school would be totally wasted. I planned to find a way to have her admitted directly to college. I believed that such a step would add years to her life and life to her years.

I knew that it would be difficult to do and that obstacles stood in my way. I was engaged in an intense campaign to have a bill passed in the state legislature to authorize the City of Miami to pay me damages for my stolen manuscript. Further, an accident had caused temporary paralysis in my right arm, while my heart episodes had become more frequent and of longer duration. It was not a good time in my life to begin a new battle.

To make the move more difficult, Bella was firmly opposed to taking Edith out of school and entering her in college. She felt that since Edith had already skipped two grades, she was far too young for college. She once said to me, "You have stolen the child from me—I said nothing. You stole her childhood—I voiced no protest. Should anything happen to her as a result of this experiment, I shall never forgive you."

Bella's opposition was fortified by the school authorities from the superintendent to the last teacher. Finally Edith was frightened and frustrated by the conflict between her parents, a conflict which was of long standing and which threatened to end in a divorce. Nevertheless, I was determined to undertake what Bella thought was a "crazy scheme."

As my first step, I issued a press release stating I would not permit Edith to attend high school under any circumstances. I wrote, "I feel that the public school system is inadequate and will retard my daughter's intellectual growth and development." A con-

ference was soon arranged with the school officials who told me that if I took her out of school, I would be prosecuted "since public education is compulsory until the age of 16 in Florida." I replied that I would prove in court that my training at home was by far superior to the public school. Whereupon the official answered "Edith will enter college before graduation from high school only over my dead body."

Undeterred, I continued to pursue my plan. First I went to the University of Miami where I was greeted at the guidance department with disbelief and ridicule when I asked that Edith be permitted to take the battery of entrance examinations. Her IQ had been tested in New York five years earlier at 201 and I knew well that her scores on the entrance examination would be quite high. This I hoped would at least disarm, if not defeat, my opponents. Unfortunately, the university did not permit her to take the tests.

The next target was Miami-Dade Junior College where I met with the head of the counseling service. To my surprise, he greeted my suggestion with a great deal of enthusiasm. I complained that school authorities are more concerned with peace and tranquility than with progress. I felt they opposed Edith's admission to college because they were afraid it would establish a precedent and encourage other gifted children to seek early admission to college. This, of course, was my hope and one of my objectives. A broad smile crossed his face and I knew that I had won an ally.

My hopes were further brightened when I showed him Edith's term paper in mathematics which was already beyond my comprehension. He admitted that he was not a mathematician, but in his opinion "the excellence of her organization and the proficiency of her language indicated work at the level of a college sophomore." As our discussion ended, we shook hands, and he assured me that he would discuss the matter with the college president. He said they would notify me soon of the decision.

I had won a battle, but being realistic, I was aware that a struggle still lay ahead. Since Miami-Dade Junior College was within the jurisdiction of the school superintendent's office, I knew the school officials would continue to oppose Edith's admission to college, if only as a matter of maintaining their prestige.

Shortly after the meeting, I went to Tallahassee, the state capital, to fight for the passage of my bill. During the several weeks I was there my daily phone calls home revealed that the college officials had not tried to get in touch with me. Bella sarcastically

remarked over the phone, "If they need her, they will call her. I shall refrain from bothering the college."

Finally, I won passage of my bill authorizing Miami to pay me twenty-five thousand dollars. Although the city never awarded me the money, at the time I was jubilant and returned home with renewed energy. As soon as I could arrange it, I met with the college president. From the tone of his voice, I knew that he was under pressure not to admit Edith. Nevertheless, he authorized her to take the admission examination.

Edith scored in the upper 10% of the applicants seeking admission to college—a remarkable feat for a twelve-year-old girl. A final conference was arranged with the guidance department head. As he congratulated Edith, she said, "I could have done a lot better if I had not spent the two nights before reading books." She neglected to tell him that she also had completed the test in about half of the allotted time, relinquishing her opportunity to check back over her answers—a custom which Edith still follows in examinations.

We met again with the president, who informed us that Edith would be admitted as a full-time student in the coming summer semester. I assured him that he would never regret his decision; since Edith would definitely justify his confidence.

Edith's admission to the junior college went smoothly. Unlike many high school graduates who have difficulty adjusting to the demands of college, she entered academic life secure in her belief that she could meet the new responsibilities without difficulty. Although Bella had wanted her to take a breathing spell before starting, Edith insisted that she be enrolled for the early summer term.

To reassure Bella, I took her with me the first day when I went to pick up Edith. She nervously paced the halls outside of the classroom. "God knows whether the presence of all the students won't terrify her. Will she be able to follow the lectures?"

"Don't worry, your fears are unjustified. She could have entered college a year ago."

Soon the bell rang and Edith came out of the classroom. "How was it?" Bella asked.

"Perhaps it was less boring, but I still managed to finish a science fiction book." I could not conceal my laughter.

Edith did quite well in college that summer scoring A's in both her courses. When the term was over, she attended a two-week session at a conservation camp near Ocala. This was her first time away from home alone and she was reluctant to go. The other campers were boys and girls aged from ten to fourteen. By prior agreement, Edith was assigned to the oldest group. She was twelve and in junior college; they were fourteen and in junior high school. In the past, she had difficulty getting along with similar children and now she had to live with them for two weeks.

I had asked the camp managers to keep her enrollment in college a secret. However, the children wanted to know about one another and Edith also, of course. They asked what grade she would be in in the fall and what school she would be attending. Eventually, having no choice, she had to disclose her secret. Then they laughed at her because they thought she was lying. She called home reluctantly to request her school transcript which I mailed. After she showed it to them, the children viewed her with suspicion and left her alone for the remainder of the session.

In September, Edith returned to college. David was now five, and Bella thought he should start school, arguing that since my health was bad, taking care of him was too difficult. She pointed out that sooner or later we would have to enroll him in school, "so we might as well give him an early start," she argued. I fought to keep him at home, but she was right. I did not have the strength to keep up with him.

Since he was too young for public school, we decided to enroll David in a new branch of the Hebrew Academy. The school principal told me to take him to a child psychologist who would determine if he was mature enough for first grade. After a twenty-minute examination, the psychologist advised me that David was not ready to confront a classroom situation. I did not agree with him. Rather, as I had done earlier when the test reports showed that Edith was not ready for advancement, I convinced the principal to enroll David in spite of the psychologist's recommendations.

David was relatively satisfied in first grade. I had taught him to speak Hebrew when he was two, which was quite helpful since the classes were conducted in both Hebrew and English. This made school more interesting to him. He was one of the top pupils in the class, although he rapidly began to forget much of what I had previously taught him. His vocabulary began to shrink and instead of the three and four digit multiplications he had been doing, he was now doing simple additions. Further,

he came home tired after a forty-five-minute bus ride. I was sick a lot, and thus unable either to enforce the ban on television or to work with him much.

Edith, meanwhile, was excelling at Miami-Dade Junior College. She quietly pursued her studies, earning straight A's, while still avidly reading. Having been trained years earlier to research subjects thoroughly, she had no need to take lengthy notes in class, nor was she overly concerned with tests and term papers. "An effective professor should guide and stimulate independent research. The library, rather than the classroom, should determine the student's scholastic progress," she insisted. She felt "sorry for the students who spent an entire class period laboriously and indiscriminately writing down every word the instructor said."

For the first time in her life, Edith was well accepted socially. Students would drive her home after school, many of them visited her on weekends, and the phone was seldom idle. As in the past, she continued to play chess with David.

At thirteen she was about five foot six, with dark brown hair falling to her shoulders in—as she described it—"classic beatnik style." With her dark rimmed glasses, she was reported in the press to be "scholarly attractive." She was the type of girl who could pass for thirteen or twenty. I had arranged with the junior college that her age should not be known to the other students, and, although the newspapers quickly discovered her, many of her classmates did not know how young she was. At times this led to amusing situations.

In a creative writing class, she was given an assignment to write a poem which could be easily understood by thirteen or fourteen-year-olds. The following day, she was asked to read her poem in class. During the discussion of it, one student of about twenty said, "The poem has great merits for its esthetic beauty and its meaningful message." Then he continued, "How in the world would you expect a fourteen-year-old child to understand it?" Edith exchanged meaningful glances with the instructor secure in the belief that her secret would be well guarded.

One of her schoolmates was a middle-aged woman. One night while Edith and some other students were at the woman's house finishing a group project, the woman told her fifteen-year-old daughter to go to bed. The girl complained to Edith and asked, "Did your parents treat you so inconsiderately when you were my age?"

"My treatment was pretty much the same," Edith replied, concealing her laughter.

Sending a child Edith's age to college also presented problems, marking a new phase in my relationship with her. Previously, my work with her had been quite productive, satisfying for the most part her mental, physical, and recreational needs. In spite of the fact that her genius had placed her out of contact with her age group, she functioned cheerfully, with books and music. I did not have the heartaches of many parents whose children are rebellious. While there was not complete agreement between Edith and me on everything—I encouraged her to be an individual—there was a common scale of values and priorities.

Now, her entrance to college altered our relationship. I was faced with the problem of a college student who in many ways was not old enough to have adult responsibilities. For example, I had to tell her to brush her teeth, to polish her shoes, to take a shower, and to abstain from starches since she gained weight easily. In return, she constantly argued, "If I have formally entered adult life, I request the right to conduct myself as I see fit, whether it is brushing my hair or going to bed." I could not yet, however, abdicate my responsibilities as a parent.

Our relationship also changed in other ways, particularly because going to college resulted in a transformation in her. In public school, she had been hopelessly bored by the slow pace of instruction and she had viewed her schoolmates with some contempt. Now in college, her ability and resourcefulness were challenged and she sought and gained recognition from the other students. As part of this new liberation, she grew somewhat rebellious toward her parents and society—an attitude common for the generation of which she was now a member. At this time, in spite of her young age, she began to smoke.

In the fall of 1966, the parochial school closed the branch which David had attended because of financial difficulties. Rather than have him spend hours in traffic going to the main building of the school in Miami Beach, we enrolled him in a public school. Now he became much more of an ordinary student. His previous desire for knowledge was tempered by school regimentation and conformity and Bella continued to press him to be a normal child saying, "One genius in the family is enough." These experiences slowed his development, but he remained a bright youngster whose imagination would spring forth at the slightest challenge.

One of the consequences of my work with Edith was her popularity with the press. Because I was interested in improving education for all children, I welcomed publicity as a means of getting my message across. However, Edith did not care for it, regarding it as an invasion of her privacy. While she was at the junior college, I gave a lecture in New York in which I mentioned her. Afterwards, a reporter, who had been in the audience asked me if he could write a magazine story on her. I agreed, hoping that the story would help education. That night, I called Edith and asked her to be cooperative and polite to him. She agreed.

The next day, the reporter braved a hurricane and flew into Miami on the last plane. Edith, meanwhile, had dressed herself as a maid, and greeted him when he arrived. Disguising her normal voice—she once described it as “a neutral accent with a touch of Brooklyn in it”—with a Southern one, she informed him that “Miss Edith just left this morning for a prolonged weekend in Atlanta.” The reporter left without his interview.

Edith did very well in the junior college program, completing the two year sequence in a year and a half with an A average, and thus fully vindicating me. At the graduation ceremonies, she won a standing ovation from the faculty, students, and parents. After the ceremonies I purchased a twelve dollar radio—the most expensive present she had ever received in recognition of her achievements.

After her graduation, she entered Florida Atlantic University in January of 1967. Although she could have secured admission to almost any prestigious university, I selected Florida Atlantic, a newly organized school, because it was located only about thirty miles from our home which served the dual purpose of permitting her to have a measure of independence while still having her close enough that she could visit us on weekends. I was not yet ready to send my fourteen-year old daughter hundreds or thousands of miles away to be on her own.

She was now a junior in college and was to live in a dormitory on campus. This lead to some concern by the university officials. The dean of women suggested that because of her age, Edith should have a ten o'clock curfew. This time, Bella came to Edith's defense. She told the dean, “Since Edith is mature enough to be a college junior, she should enjoy the privileges granted to other students.” The dean consented and I was overjoyed that Bella had finally been converted.

In many ways, Edith was a typical college student. We would frequently visit her and often on weekends, she would come home with loads of dirty laundry, as college students everywhere are likely to do.

During that term at Florida Atlantic, she told me that she had decided to become a mathematician. As we walked along the Fort Lauderdale beach one evening engaged in one of our frequent debates, I could tell that she was preparing me for a shock. This became more apparent as she buried her head in her arms as we sat down in the sand. "Edith, what's bugging you?" I asked.

At first she insisted that nothing was, but finally she said, "Dad, I have reached a decision. One that might be contrary to your expectations." She knew well that I had wanted her to go into medicine. "After months of soul searching, I have decided to become a mathematician."

Surprised, I interrupted to ask if the decision was final. She assured me it was. I then reminded her that math was not her best subject. "But why?" I asked. "Are you searching for martyrdom? Are you being masochistic?"

She agreed that mathematics was not her strong subject. Impatiently, I continued. "Edith, as you will agree, a physician personifies the most noble aspirations of man. What can be more fulfilling than to heal the sick? There are so many dreadful diseases to be conquered such as cancer and heart disease, both of which have claimed the best part of my life. This is the frontier that ought to challenge the best minds. Or if you don't want to be a physician, you could become an attorney. After all, compassion and commitment to the ideals of justice are your outstanding features. There is a wide spectrum of professions for which you are better qualified than mathematics. As a mathematician how will you be able to contribute to the welfare of man?"

"Dad, I have weighed the pros and cons of this step. I have considered your feelings, but I still think it is the best decision. First, I am not going to follow the road of least resistance. Second, I believe that it is time that I cut the umbilical cord from you. Third, since mathematics is not my strongest subject, I feel I must overcome and master it. It is time that I stand on my own feet and become knowledgeable in a field which is alien to you. I have to act as an independent individual. Isn't this consistent with your values and concepts? Wasn't it you who taught me to meet challenges and to seek the truth? I regard college teaching

as a very noble profession. It doesn't always pay well, but I have no desire to obtain wealth anyway."

"Edith, I must confess that this is the most triumphant moment of my life."

Although David was not progressing particularly well in school that year, he closely followed current events. For years, historians will speculate whether Hubert Humphrey's staunch support of the Vietnam involvement and his abrupt switch to the doves' side later, cost him the presidency in 1968. As far as David was concerned, Humphrey was discredited in the spring of 1967 before the anti-war sentiment had become so popular.

Humphrey, crossing the country in an attempt to build support for the administration's policies in the face of a widening credibility gap, was scheduled to address a rally one Sunday afternoon in Greynolds Park, a short distance from our home. When David came home that day, worn out from fishing, I asked him, "Would you like to go with me to the park to hear the Vice President? While we are there we can take a boat ride, do some botanical exploration, and then just talk." He eagerly agreed.

The park, an attraction for the local hippie community, was tightly guarded by a police detail and Secret Service men. On the makeshift platform, the local politicians delivered speeches while the audience ate the free hot dogs and drank soft drinks, waiting for Humphrey's arrival. One dignitary took the microphone and pledged "vigorous support to our brave boys who sacrifice their lives in the defense of our country in Vietnam."

David was unmoved by the eloquence of the distinguished looking speaker. "Dad, I fail to understand why should our boys sacrifice their lives in the defense of our country eight thousand miles away."

"Be quiet, David. We will discuss it later."

Soon a chain of limousines approached. The ever-smiling vice president got out and, accompanied by Secret Service men and local dignitaries, climbed to the platform. According to the notes which I took, he began a vigorous attack on those "who fail to see our humanitarian task in defending the South Vietnamese against the Communist aggressors." Murmurs could be heard from some of the hippies and a few posters appeared denouncing the war. Humphrey, with the zeal of a Baptist preacher, continued. "After all, in compliance with our moral and treaty obligations, we must

defend this remote outpost of democracy. We must assist a friendly, freely chosen government . . ."

David was outraged by Humphrey's speech. Finally, he could no longer restrain himself. "What an unadulterated lie. Where is democracy when the political opponents of Ky perish in jail?"

"Be quiet, David. Don't interfere with the man's freedom of speech."

"God, what a lie!" David yelled out.

The Secret Service agents, preoccupied with keeping a close watch on the hippies, were unaware of David's determination to mount the platform and give the "true" version of Vietnam. Unable to cope with him, I had to carry the child out of the park with my hand covering his mouth. "What is your boy screaming about?" a policeman asked as we were leaving.

"He wants an ice cream cone," I said.

"Here is a dime. Buy yourself some ice cream, little boy."

Overcoming my restraint, David threw the dime back to the officer and shouted, "Give it to Humphrey to fight his war."

At home, I scolded David for his conduct. "I'll control my outbursts in the future. But you know, Dad, if Humphrey should ever run for President, I think he will be defeated."

"Why do you think so?" I asked.

"He obviously lacks objectivity. Otherwise he would not have defended our involvement in Vietnam."

# CHAPTER 11

## *The Limelight*

Edith's admission to Florida Atlantic University was well publicized. News stories proliferated as reporters gathered at the university to interview "the girl genius." Hundreds of requests for interviews poured in. The phone was constantly jammed. Mail in bag loads arrived at home and at the college. Still shunning publicity, Edith became so angry that she requested the school administration to place a guard at the dormitory to screen the visitors and weed out the newspapermen, some of whom disguised themselves to conceal their identity.

My view on this issue was different. While I wanted to assure Edith the highest degree of privacy, I was also eager to tell the world about her success, hoping to encourage children and parents to seek quality education and to disarm my critics who often viewed my methods "as the obsession of a mad scientist who eagerly sacrifices his own child to test his dangerous concepts." However, my aims were frequently misinterpreted in the press, as reporters, in an effort to make the stories more provocative, depicted Edith as a "frustrated and unhappy child who had been transformed into a computer."

Foreign journalists too appeared on the scene. Their editors, rather than accepting wire service releases, wanted direct interviews. The State Department, recognizing the child's propaganda value, published a story about her in the U. S. Information Service foreign publications, including the ones behind the Iron Curtain. A high ranking State Department official telephoned one day to ask me to extend every courtesy to the foreign newsmen. He said "it is rare that foreign papers have anything nice to say about the United States. Perhaps the stories about Edith were the first

favorable ones printed behind the Iron Curtain about our country since the second world war."

Edith and I were interviewed over the voice of America during which we told our story. Although the Voice of America is frequently criticized for editing and managing the news, our experience with it was quite satisfactory. My criticism of the public school system was broadcast to the four hundred million listeners without changes. In fact, it was broadcast in its entirety four times.

Edith often tried to foil the efforts of the newsmen. Once when she was interviewed over the telephone on a nationwide broadcast, the interview lasted too long and she became restless. Finally, she asked her roommate to flush the toilet. Listeners throughout the nation must have been surprised to hear the sound of a flushing toilet terminate the interview.

Edith's photographs must have been valuable, for many photographers, unable to penetrate her classrooms or dormitory, followed her around on the campus to take candid shots. She greatly resented such tactics. Once as she ate in the university cafeteria, two men sat down opposite her. As one began to fix his camera, she suspected his intention and made a face at him. Undeterred, he went on tinkering with his camera until the outraged Edith stood up, stuck her tongue out, and angrily asked, "How much will this picture bring you?"

"Young lady, I have no intention of taking your picture in any pose whatsoever." Embarrassingly, the elderly gentleman proved to be an official of the State University system on an inspection tour.

Once when I was in New York on business, I was introduced by an acquaintance to an official of CBS as the "guy who breeds geniuses."

"What does he breed?"

"Geniuses."

"You have a good sense of humor," said the official.

My acquaintance then told him the story about Edith and showed him some newspaper clippings. Impressed, the CBS man invited me to visit him at his office the next day.

That night I was not able to sleep. This was my great opportunity to tell the whole story to the world without editorial comments. I was hopeful that I would be able to expose the inade-

quacies of the public school system and to present constructive alternatives.

The next day I was at CBS at the appointed time. The official explained that the network was interested in doing a show on Edith, but he had been unable to find Florida Atlantic University listed in the directory. I explained that it was a new but good school. The producer wanted some time to consult his associates, but was fairly certain CBS would do the story, which he assured me "would be told in full without taking any statements out of context."

Back home I had to face my "adversary." "Listen, Edith, this is no ordinary publicity. This broadcast will permit you to address yourself to twenty-five million people. It will give you the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the battle for better education, to share with the public your experiences, and to make any comment you choose."

She protested that she was not much of an authority on education, but I disagreed. "You have a most unusual educational background, one which directly contradicts the public school philosophy. Let the world know about it so that others might benefit from it." Finally I won my point.

Weeks went by. I heard nothing from CBS, until I learned that the official to whom I had spoken suffered a heart attack. I feared that was the end of the interview, but one day he called, explaining that his ill health had upset the schedule, but that CBS was ready to do the show.

The long-awaited day arrived. The University spread the red carpet for the film crew headed by a veteran reporter. Edith was embarrassed as the news about the broadcast spread among the students, fearing that they would resent her. Everyone wanted to be in the show as sites were carefully selected and the dormitories readied for the indoor shots. Edith's roommates called their relatives around the country telling them they were going to be on television.

One afternoon the filming began. I should point out that since I do not have access to an accurate transcript of the tape, the dialogues reported here are based upon my own recollections. While they are perhaps paraphrasings of the actual interviews, I believe that they accurately reflect the content and the exchange of views.

First, Edith was interviewed. "What prompted you to leave junior high school?"

"I was bored. There was no challenge."

"Was it really your decision? Or was it your Dad's?"

"The decision was mutual."

"What do you consider to be the main trouble with the public school system?"

"It provides no stimulation. The teachers' motivation is poor for by and large they are incompetent. You have to be academically mediocre to get along with your classmates. One cannot progress at his own pace. The formative period of pre-school is totally neglected. In my case, there was a deep schism between my training at home and the work at school. I was resented by my schoolmates."

"You have just stated that you found the teachers poorly motivated and incompetent. To what do you attribute this?"

"With all due respect to those teachers who are bright and deeply dedicated despite the mediocre standards, the curriculum of teacher colleges is appalling. Much of the time is wasted on Mickey Mouse type courses. No mastery of the field of specialization is required. It is no secret that many students who are unable to maintain the minimum scholastic average at the schools of liberal arts and sciences, transfer to education courses where they do quite well. As a matter of fact, some of my friends at this school take education courses and they will verify my assessment."

"How does it feel to be with students so much older than you?"

"No problems at all."

"How is your social life?"

"Good. I understand you intend to interview some of my friends. You will see whether or not I am well accepted."

Bella, who had taken a dim view of my work with Edith, appeared next. I wondered what stand she would take, addressing herself to millions of mothers.

"Mrs. Stern, as a mother, you must have been worried about the ambitious program which your husband envisioned for Edith."

"Indeed, I was deeply concerned and frightened. I feared then

that her emotional growth would not keep pace with her intellectual development."

"Was that fear justified?"

"Not at all. Now that she attends college, she is much happier. Emotionally Edith is well adjusted. Her social life is rich and full."

"Would you recommend such a course of action to other parents?"

"Most definitely. I would urge them to work with their children from infancy. Having done this, they will find the school pace to be totally unacceptable."

"From the news reports, I gather your views have radically changed."

"That is true. Do not forget that the whole educational world opposed Aaron's work. I had faith in the experts' judgment."

"How does Edith relate to you?"

"Unlike many mothers, I have no communication gap with her. We understand each other quite well. She is affectionate and reciprocates my love."

The next day I was interviewed. Then a number of Edith's friends had their turn. The reporter asked questions such as how they got along with Edith, if her age was a problem, and if she was snobbish. They all gave a very favorable impression of her. David, also was interviewed. He frankly related how school was boring him.

As the finale, a gray-haired, distinguished-looking professor emeritus of Columbia University, who was then a professor at Florida Atlantic, went to the microphone. The reporter asked, "As a professor of education, how do you view Edith's progress?"

"I am appalled. Here is a child who became the scapegoat of her father's obsession. Emotionally immature, she cannot cope with college pressures. You can see how frustrated she is. Indeed it is a tragedy."

The professor, visibly agitated, could find little consolation in the faces of the onlookers who, to say the least, disagreed with him. There was something grotesque and tragic in his deportment. After the professor's interview, he warned Bella about "the horrible consequences which might follow, such as a nervous breakdown, maladjustment and perhaps suicide."

Having failed to persuade the mother to "take energetic steps in order to safeguard the child by immediately withdrawing her from the university," he turned to the reporter who had listened attentively to the conversation.

"I beg you in the interest of education, do not broadcast these interviews for they can destroy the nation's faith in public school education. They might cause a great deal of harm to our youth."

Having no stomach to listen to these stupidities, I left abruptly, waving goodbye to the reporter.

The following weeks were very eventful as press conferences and TV appearances claimed our time. So busy was I that I did not learn whether CBS had broadcast the show or refrained from doing so due to the pressure exerted by the educational establishment.

Edith, however, became concerned as time went by and CBS did not air the show. "While I have never followed newspaper stories about me, this time I am embarrassed. The university and my friends who were interviewed would like to know when the interviews will be broadcast," she complained to me.

Sometime later, after she had graduated from Florida Atlantic and began her graduate studies at Michigan State University, Edith called home. "Dad, I just watched the show which CBS did on the Pentagon with great interest. It really took guts. Apparently the educational establishment is more powerful than the military since CBS declined to air our interview."

"Which interview?"

"Remember the one at Florida Atlantic?"

"For the moment, I had forgotten about it."

"So had I until I watched the Pentagon show," replied Edith.

Although CBS chose not to broadcast the film, Edith's remarkable ability to function well at fourteen away from home finally disarmed some of my ardent critics. Hence a measure of exoneration by the public and the educational establishment could be noticed. The impact was so great that some of my critics now adopted a "me too" attitude. An official who had blocked my efforts to have Edith tested at the University of Miami said, "I always knew she was destined for greatness." The county Board of Public Instruction which had resisted my efforts to take Edith out of school suddenly decided to award her an honorary high school diploma, the first in their history. The Dade County Com-

mission, whose assistance I had vainly sought when I was opposed by the school board, awarded a certificate of appreciation to the girl who "has become a wonder in her own time as the fruition of a scientific, educational experiment by her father, Aaron Stern."

The most amazing and gratifying result of the publicity was undoubtedly the letters which arrived from tens of thousands of people from around the world. Unfortunately, I only had the funds to answer a few of them. Edith had become so well known that some letters were addressed simply to "Genius, Florida Atlantic University." To test it, I asked a friend in New York to address a letter to "Wunderkind, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida." She received it promptly.

Some of the mail came from religious fanatics who described Edith's success as "a sign of the coming of the Messiah." In some letters, opportunists sought endorsements of their ideas and products while others offered lucrative financial rewards for the advertisement of their educational products. One suggested that we lend our name to a "Correspondence School for Molding Geniuses." I was proud of Edith who stated, "I will not prostitute myself into deceiving the public for any sort of material gain."

There were the inevitable letters from psychologists, psychiatrists, and educators warning me that "the course on which you embark might have disastrous repercussions on the child's development. Pushing a child beyond the chronological limits leads to maladjustment and often suicide." Since Edith was extremely happy, functioning well in an adult society, we disregarded this advice with defiant laughter.

Some letters arrived from, as Edith termed them, "members of the fat-dripping suburbia" telling how much Edith had missed the "joy of being a cheer-leader and participating in high school dances with her peers." These Edith dismissed as "trivia which glorify mediocrity."

Many letters arrived from former convicts and drug addicts who complained that their education was inadequate and, as a result, their lack of purpose and boredom led them to crime and drug addiction. One lamented, "If the school failed to inspire me towards academic growth, the least they could do is to equip me with vocational skills. What choice had I after the high school drop-out other than stealing cars?"

Similarly, there were numerous letters from frustrated parents and students who angrily stated their disappointment with the

school system. One Cleveland housewife's letter deeply touched us.

"Since Joe, an exceedingly bright boy of thirteen, wastes his stay in school, I decided to teach Mary how to read and write before she entered first grade. The school frowned upon such an idea. Now Mary, age nine, who attends third grade, does not know yet the rudiments of reading and writing. What are we to do with her? My husband's meager income prevents us from sending our bright youngsters to a private school. We have no funds for tutoring. Please advise us what to do as I am despondent." Unfortunately there was no solution I could offer.

In spite of the concern of many well-wishers that "Edith, with her high intelligence, will not be able to get married for man was meant by God to be superior," there were quite a few marriage proposals. Edith had fun displaying the pictures of her prospects to friends. I also received a few letters from women, married and single, of which the following is an unusual example. "I am 30 years of age, white, attractive, happily married. I have always wanted to raise at least one bright child who would make a lasting contribution to the sciences. Thus far my two children show no outstanding features. In spite of the newspaper reports quoting you that 'Edith's accomplishments are entirely attributable to your educational technique' I am confident that it is due to your genetic structure. I should like to have a baby with you. Would you consent? Michael, my husband, will have no objections." A Los Angeles Post Office box identified the correspondent.

My wife, slightly embarrassed, suggested, "Perhaps this is a golden opportunity for you. You have always complained about our marriage."

The most disturbing revelation was that the mail from this country was divided between those who applauded my efforts and those who opposed them while the voluminous mail which we received from India, Pakistan, Formosa, Japan, Israel, and the whole of Europe, representing a cross-section of the population including American troops overseas, lauded Edith's accomplishments and my efforts to advance her.

Especially warm were the letters from members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Some were obviously due to nostalgia. Many were deeply moving.

One corporal from Korea wrote, "Now that I am far away

in this God-forsaken country, I came to realize the significance of education and the extraordinary sacrifices which Koreans bear to secure one. I wish my schooling had as much meaning to me."

A lady wrote from Germany, "Hitler could not have weakened the moral fabric of Germany without destroying our intellectuals and institutions of higher learning. A good education is the only hope for the world rent by hate, disease and poverty."

An Israeli engineer wrote, "The only way that we will conquer our Arab adversaries is through education. Thus, we will enlighten them about the futility of blind hate which might devour them rather than our presence in the Middle East."

As for the chronological barriers, a German professor wrote, "How come that our young people enter professional schools on completion of secondary education at eighteen, without the benefit of four years of college? Does it mean that an American doctor, attorney or engineer is better equipped than his European counterpart? Definitely not."

A Peace Corps volunteer teaching in Asia stated: "I wish my instructor had as much success in teaching me my mother tongue as I have in teaching English to the natives, some of whom walk miles to school barefoot."

A Formosan girl wrote in broken English, "I am only fourteen years of age and look forward to enter the university to pursue mathematics. My teachers are of the opinion that we need educated people and since I excel myself in mathematics, there is no need to waste time for me in secondary school. I cannot understand why would your school authorities, as the newspaper reports, object to your entry earlier to a university."

During one of her brief vacations when we were sorting the mail, Edith remarked: "Dad, I am frightened about the future of our country. It would seem to me that we glorify mediocrity in contrast to the awe and great significance which people throughout the world attach to education. Have you analyzed the mail?"

"Yes, I have."

"Weren't you appalled by the fact that not one word of criticism came from abroad? After all, the same stories were published throughout the world. How can one criticize a parent for his diligent efforts to secure the best, most meaningful education for his children?"

Encouraged by the publicity and the letters, I decided to make an effort to convince the educational establishment of the worth of my teaching methods. I had been successful with my own children and I saw no reason why I couldn't be successful with other students. In fact, at the displaced persons' camp in Bad Reichenhall I had taken children who were running wild in the streets and successfully educated them. Surely my methods could be at least as successful with American children, even with underprivileged ones.

One of my efforts was directed at the Florida State Department of Education. In 1967 I had a speaking engagement in Tallahassee, the state capital. At the time, the state school system was at a boiling point with the teachers threatening a strike which finally became a reality the following year. Additional funds were needed for education just to maintain the *status quo*, but the Republican governor lacked rapport with the Democratic legislature. This problem was further complicated by the governor's campaign promise of no additional taxes. I believed that this was an opportune time to share my educational experiences with the state authorities.

First I sought an appointment with the governor, but as usual he was out of town. Then I met briefly with the head of the House Education Committee during a special session of the legislature dealing specifically with the school crisis. He told me, "Well, it sounds exciting. Leave me your number and I'll call you to appear before the Education Committee." The call never came.

Next I saw the state superintendent of public schools, and explained my ideas. He asked, "Where am I going to secure funds for your project?" I explained that it would require very few funds. I was only asking for a couple of rooms without elaborate facilities so that I could demonstrate that my total educational submersion would work with other children. I wanted a group of young children, preferably underprivileged ones, for a period of six months. I was confident that I could raise their IQ's by at least twenty percent, and I could demonstrate teaching seven-year-old children to multiply three digit numbers in less than a week. He also thought it sounded exciting and asked me for a scientific résumé of my methods. I told him that I didn't have one.

"How can a man of your scholarship neglect such an elementary step?"

"It is plain common sense," I explained. "My greatest asset in working with Edith was adhering to plain common sense without dogmatic guidelines. It is so simple that I would not even attempt to define it in any scientific terms. Indeed, it worked for Edith."

"Well, I'll schedule a discussion for you with a few of my staff members, and a representative from the College of Education at the University."

"That would be fine." I returned to the waiting room. Soon, two women came to see me; one was a member of the superintendent's staff and the other was a professor of education. We went to lunch and I began to explain my work with Edith and David.

"What are you trying to prove?"

"Nothing. I simply desire to equip my children with as much knowledge as I can."

"Don't we all?"

"I doubt that."

"Mr. Stern, have you visited one of our public schools, recently?"

"Not really."

"Do you know that we do exactly the same?"

"How successful are you?" There was a long silence. "My dear ladies," I said, "our generals command a rich well-equipped army which does exactly the same as Moshe Dayan, whose Israeli armed forces are poor and ill equipped, but determined and dedicated in the pursuit of a just cause. How does the recent victory of Dayan compare with the pathetic situation in which we find ourselves in Vietnam?" I'm not sure they understood the analogy.

"Would you care to visit the university and meet my colleagues?"

"No, thank you." Within an hour I was on the Greyhound bus heading for home and wondering whether the American Medical Association wouldn't reject an effective cure for cancer, if such a method had been conceived by someone outside their ranks. Then I thought of David who was hopelessly bored in public school.

Another source from which I tried to obtain support for my methods was the Department of Health, Education and Welfare office in Washington, D. C. Using my meager resources and over

Bella's protests, I traveled to the capital. "They will turn a deaf ear to your proposals," she said. "Why waste precious funds at a time when we deny ourselves essentials?" I went anyway.

After checking into the YMCA, I went to the Office of Education where my efforts to see the commissioner failed at first, but eventually succeeded. Then I was directed to the acting director of the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education Research. I had a series of conferences with him and he also read the parts of the manuscript of this book which deal with my methods. The official was impressed. Then I asked, "Why does the public school system, which unquestionably is in a mess, refuse to implement these improvements?"

"Unfortunately we have no jurisdiction in this matter. It is up to the respective state departments of education."

"The federal government spends billions of dollars on schools. Surely it is interested in the improvement of the quality of education. You award huge sums on research. Why not on my proposals?"

I was told that the congress extends appropriations and suggested that I submit my proposals to them. When I asked if the Office of Education would support me, he said that they couldn't.

"Sir, my proposals deal with a dramatic breakthrough in education, one which will revolutionize the whole field at a nominal cost. I would like to establish pilot projects in every state, and in order to subject my technique to the most severe test, I would like to enroll three-year-old underprivileged children of minority groups. These youngsters, who are believed to be of low scholastic potential, will be housed in austere surroundings. I'm confident that they will achieve the second grade level in only a few months at a total cost of less than ten million dollars. The administration of the funds should be under strict federal controls while the scientific evaluation I should hope will be entrusted to private, independent universities."

"These are grandiose plans. How realistic are you in your assessment?" inquired the official.

"Could you please arrange for me, right here, while I'm in Washington a demonstration of my technique in one of the least successful schools? It would take me no more than eight to ten hours to teach two-digit multiplication to a group of ten second-grade youngsters."

"I'm afraid I could not arrange that."

At our last meeting we were joined by a few other high-ranking officials of HEW. "Why don't you attempt to implement your proposals on a state level?" asked a young man.

"I have tried. They're not interested in changes."

"Surely they must be aware of the crisis prevailing in our school system."

"Apparently not," I replied.

Disenchanted and poorer by \$300, I was sitting at a cafeteria table wondering how to explain my extravaganza to Bella who had postponed the purchase of a badly needed refrigerator for the past two years due to lack of funds. I visualized her telling me, "So another fiasco, Don Quixote. When will you learn your lesson?"

One of the officials approached me.

"My dear man, I know how disheartening it must be to you. This department sees many visionaries, with worthy proposals, who, like you, meet a deaf ear because of bureaucracy and their inability to muster political support or any number of other reasons. But above all, the greatest obstacle to innovation is the fear of change. You know, people feel that if God had wanted us to fly, he would surely have given us wings."

# CHAPTER 12

## *The Emancipated Edith*

From time to time, various quiz shows sought Edith as a contestant. The most persistent one was *To Tell the Truth*. Unable to reach her, they called me in the summer of 1967. The producer argued that the affidavit which was broadcast before each show would be an excellent way to tell our story objectively. I thought his argument had merit, but, as usual, Edith disagreed. "I refuse to be an accomplice to misleading advertising. I've turned down lucrative offers before, and I'll turn down this one," she stated.

"But Edith," I pleaded, "please weigh carefully the merits of the affidavit. The producer will have no choice but to state the whole truth and thus vindicate me from the allegations that I stole your childhood. And think how many youngsters will be inspired by your achievements. You will advance the cause of quality education."

Edith gave in. "Set the wheels in motion," she said.

Soon the producer mailed airline tickets and made reservations at the Americana Hotel in New York. After some arguing, Edith finally consented to accept, as I recall, \$500 to "defray the cost of sightseeing, concerts, and a Broadway show."

On our arrival at the hotel, a representative of the show greeted us. "I hope you will enjoy your stay in New York. We at the studio are thrilled to have you, the most celebrated youngster in America. Please drop in this afternoon at the office. The taping is scheduled for tomorrow." Soon we were on our way toward the East Side to visit the galleries. Edith discovered the book stores where she spent about twenty percent of our budget.

When we returned to the hotel, the doorman eyed Edith, inexpensively dressed and laden with books, then curtly advised, "This is not the service entrance."

"Thank you kindly for the information, my good man," replied Edith as she walked through the main door.

At the producer's office we signed an agreement, then jointly drafted an affidavit. After the producer's staff typed it, we carefully read it and found that some changes had been made. "Did you say I will hopefully obtain my bachelor's degree at eighteen. You are wrong. I should earn it when I am fifteen or earlier." The girl didn't believe it and went to check with researchers.

"I am told that no girl has ever finished college at the age of fifteen," she said.

"Fine, then I will establish a precedent," Edith replied. The next day we returned for the taping. As usual, there were two other contestants, one of whom was a daughter of a powerful political figure in N.Y., and the other, the child of a writer. Edith was sarcastic. "As you can see, Dad, ours is a land of equal opportunity. It is purely coincidental that out of three million city kids, the producer could find these two only."

"Edith, do not look for utopia. These are brutal facts of life. My struggle for better, more meaningful education has as its objective the uplifting and advancement of the broad masses of people, toward a better life, the development of their skills and talents."

"Dad, I'm grateful to you for your work with me, now as I compare myself with these unfortunate ones who suffer from intellectual poverty in the midst of affluence."

"Edith, I think these girls are bright by comparison with others."

"Most unfortunately, you are right, Dad."

Prior to the show, the contestants were briefed and questioned. Edith, of course, towered above the other two children with her encyclopedic knowledge. The staff quizzed, "If a panel member asks you what your curriculum consists of, what would you say?"

"What is curriculum?" the two contestants asked, as Edith politely restrained her laughter.

"What have you learned about photosynthesis?"

"I don't know the meaning of it," replied one of the girls.

Edith later bitterly complained to me that "it is tragic that these girls will attain great success by the virtue of parental wealth and position, while so many gifted people are destined to struggle for survival."

Our first skirmish came when the makeup woman appeared. Edith refused to be made up. "I fulfilled our agreement to an iota. There is not a word about makeup or grooming of my hair."

"But it is in your interest. You will look better on the air," pleaded the woman.

"I'm quite happy the way I am."

"Would you like to change your dress? We have one available."

"Most definitely not. There is nothing wrong with my dress. I have worn it a year and I like it."

After a quick rehearsal with the substitute panel, Edith, composed and slightly indifferent, was on the air. The other contestants, in contrast, appeared to be insecure as shown in their nervous facial movements.

At the end of the show, Edith was expected to stand up. She was hesitant, but the other two girls gently prodded her. "I really didn't want to stand up," she explained later. "They don't have to know me."

When we were ready to leave, the wife of the politician graciously invited us to meet her husband. Edith politely rejected the invitation. "You are the first person to decline such an invitation," the disappointed lady replied.

"I am sorry, but our schedule is so crowded," gently apologized Edith. Later I asked her why she rejected the invitation. "Dad, I don't need any more publicity. I'd rather spend an evening at Lincoln Center." A few months later, Edith turned down another invitation with a succinct note: "I shall not break bread with you until our troops are withdrawn from Vietnam."

The rest of our stay in New York was very pleasant. Edith was intoxicated with the diversity and cosmopolitan character of the city which she had not seen for seven years. Reluctantly, she left the Staten Island Ferry, claiming its five-cent fare was "the last vestige of fiscal sanity in the sea of inflation."

The visit to our old neighborhood was nostalgic, and triumphant. "Here is the geans about whom her father bragged so much. We thought he was crazy," remarked our old neighbor.

The concert at Lincoln Center, a Broadway play, Guggenheim Natural History Museum—all overwhelmed her. Her mood was so good that without bickering, she consented to an interview by a syndicated columnist, and by a *New York Post* reporter. "I think I can lift the moratorium this time," she said cheerfully.

We quickly ran out of money and had to return home instead of seeing the world exposition in Montreal as we had planned. At the airport, David, Bella, and a few friends came to greet us "You know, Edith," her seven-year-old brother said, "I was so mad sitting at the TV set for I knew every answer. How stupid those kids were."

I had no doubt that David could answer the questions, for while as expected he did poorly in school, he was intelligent and quite knowledgeable. One of my best educational projects with him began later that year. In December, 1967, the world's first successful heart transplant stirred the hope and imagination of people everywhere. We thought the event was significant not only because Dr. Bernard had dared to cross a new frontier in surgery in the face of strong criticism, and thus bring a new ray of hope in the struggle against this deadly disease, but also because it meant hope for the day when my own heart could be replaced by another, vibrant one.

David came to me early in the morning after the news of the transplant was first released. "Dad, I can visualize you playing ball with me and riding a bicycle."

"That is wishful thinking. How do you expect my heart to be so improved? Be realistic."

"I am realistic, Dad. Dr. Bernard in South Africa has transplanted the heart of a young person into a much older patient than you and it functions well."

"That might be so, David, but we cannot predict how long it will function and whether the body will reject this alien organ."

The expression on his face suggested deep disappointment as he tip-toed back to his room. I knew the child would be unable to fall asleep again. Nor did I. As I lay there, I contemplated going to South Africa as an experimental patient. There was little to lose, but much to gain. Then I thought about David. Why not seize this opportunity for educational purposes and exploit it fully? Since the boy was concerned with the prospects of a transplant for me, it might provide an excellent incentive for learning.

The next day I thought a lot about the heart transplant, but I

said nothing to David. In the evening, I asked him to check my heart while I was lying down to rest. He enthusiastically took the stethoscope from my headboard and began to listen to my heartbeat. "You don't have a spasm at the present. The beat is rhythmic and full."

"Do you think I should take a Quinidine?"

"No," he replied.

"David, what a puzzle this muscle is. It is so simple, yet so complex."

"Yes, Daddy." His eyes lit up.

Gradually I guided his interest. Finally, I suggested, "Suppose I let you investigate all you can about heart transplants so that I can make my decision based on your recommendations."

"Dad, I would love it." He warmly embraced me and a kiss sealed the deal. From that day on, most of David's activities focused on news surrounding the heart transplant. Once more, I had turned my liability into an asset.

David began to read every news release with an insatiable zeal. One day he said, "It seems to me that the major problem is rejection. It is ironic that the defense forces which protect the man against hostile bacteria also attempt to destroy a transplanted life-saving organ."

"Is that so?" I asked.

"Indeed, it is."

"Let's study it then."

"Fine, Dad."

I told him all that I knew about the immunological defenses in the body, drawing on my limited background in biology, but that was not enough for David. He then consulted his sister's biology textbook, and unsatisfied with it, obtained information from other sources on tissue characteristics and tissue matching methods.

"Dad, it is a shame there was not more thorough research in this area before the first heart transplant was performed."

"Well, David, apparently the medical profession did not regard this breakthrough as feasible or desirable so soon. Perhaps Dr. Bernard, impatient in his desire to save a patient's life, simply decided to proceed on his own after years of cherishing his dream."

"Dad, I love him for it. He is my hero."

Following the death of Louis Washkansky, Bernard's first transplant patient, the criticism of the operation gained momentum and then subsided. His success with Philip Blaiberg a month later brought about a proliferation of heart transplants everywhere and within six months, well over a hundred hearts had been transplanted.

One day David happily reported to me, "Daddy, it seems to me that a major milestone in heart transplants has been reached; a serum was developed in Holland which promises to combat effectively the rejection immunity of the body."

"Did you learn that at school?"

"You must be kidding me," he replied.

One morning he excitedly woke me up quite early. "Daddy, your heart beat was much slower and fuller when I checked you with the stethoscope." He was right. My next visit to my doctor confirmed it. As we discussed my frequent heart spasms and the administration of a new drug which the doctor had previously prescribed, he explained that the purpose of it was to reduce my heart rate, an objective which the drug accomplished. I smiled. The cardiologist, accustomed to my pensive moods, was surprised.

"I know it," I said. "My son diagnosed it."

Soon I realized that I had an opportunity to broaden David's interest, this time in the social sciences. One day I came home with a box of pins and a world map which I had purchased for seventy-five cents. David immediately asked, "Daddy, what is that for?" Then after a few seconds, "Don't tell me, I know. We will follow the heart transplants as they occur and place a pin in the respective cities."

The map was placed in his room on the wall above his bed. Each time a heart transplant operation was reported, he inserted a pin.

"David, where did the latest heart transplant take place?"

"In France, Daddy."

"Was it successful?"

"Well, the patient is still alive."

"What do you know about France? Since the country is so advanced medically, we should like to know more about it," I prodded him gently.

"Oh, I have done that all ready." It was difficult to conceal my pride as he proceeded. "I looked up France in the encyclopedia. DeGaulle is the President." Then in rapid succession, "France had a tragic history. The Nazi occupation and the futile war in Algiers and Indochina. I think we should leave Vietnam at once. The French mistakes there should have taught us a lesson."

Now a new opportunity for branching out to a yet broader area was available. During the next few days, David learned about the Geneva Convention governing the conduct of war. We drew comparisons between the Middle East conflict and Indochina. Quite often, I acted as a devil's advocate to challenge him. The debates became heated. Finally David, who had been deeply opposed to the American involvement in Vietnam even before the incident with Humphrey a year earlier, and who abhorred violence, suggested that there are just and unjust wars.

"Well, what is your definition of a just war?"

"The struggle against Hitler. Nazi Germany was determined to annihilate the Jews and to subjugate all the conquered people to serve the German Reich in slavery. Likewise Israel has no choice but to resort to arms in defense of its people against enemies who in their own words are determined to push Israel into the sea. On the other hand, one cannot visualize North Vietnam being a threat to the U.S. no matter how much we resent their political system."

I could not resist his charm and logic. "Here is a dime. Run over to the store for an ice cream."

"I rather do it later. NBC news will be on shortly."

Relentlessly pursuing the transplant project, he learned about twenty or so different countries. Of course, he also followed the transplants conducted in the United States. In the process, my boy learned about the diversity of opinions and about the interactions of social and religious groups as they debated the merits and demerits of the transplants. He also learned about the legal ramifications and the cost of medical services.

Undoubtedly, the greatest challenge came when a heart transplant took place in an Iron Curtain country. I decided to explore the complexity of a different socio-political system.

"Well, Dad, having read about the Soviet Union and its allies, I'm sure glad to live in the U.S.A."

"So am I," I answered. "But why do you say that?"

"For example, you are an outspoken critic of the war in Vietnam and our public school system, yet you will not be harmed for your views. In the Soviet Union, however, you would have been put in jail for criticizing the government's policies."

Little had David realized when he began the heart transplant project that he was destined to acquire a vast body of knowledge.

Edith continued to progress well at Florida Atlantic, both socially and academically. People had always been concerned about how she would relate to boys, but now the questions became more frequent, especially from reporters. They wanted to know if she dated, if she got along with boys, and if she planned to get married. These questions could be expected, particularly in a society which bases the status of a woman largely on the accomplishments of her husband.

My determination to accelerate her progress was in part influenced by the fact that she was a female. Too often I have observed girls of superior intellect torn between men and the pursuit of their own professional goals. For example, there is some degree of merit in the reluctance of many medical schools to admit women students since they are too frequently lost to matrimony before graduation. A recent survey at a nursing school disclosed that a substantial percentage of female students sought admission solely for the purpose of meeting a "nice doctor."

The tacticians of Madison Avenue cleverly portray a woman as a sex kitten whose supreme bliss in life is to linger in luxury. Her half-naked body can sell anything from a toothpick to a generator. The price of this is devastating in terms of the waste of the tremendous talent of women. I would guess that if we ever fail in our contest with the Communist world, it will be due to their successful utilization of the abilities of their women. Such considerations weighed heavily in my determination to help Edith become a superior person.

She is a militant adherent of the woman's liberation movement and her accomplishments readily dispell the myth of male superiority. "Remember, Dad, the press interviews you conducted when I was little and the disbelief expressed when you maintained that a woman could surpass a man? I guess you were right. I think that your work with me was the beginning of an effective woman's liberation movement."

In regards to marriage, she has said that in its present form it has lost its relevance, remaining static as the society became

more complex. To substantiate this, Edith cites the staggering rate of divorces. "Marriage will become more meaningful when the woman is an equal partner, financially liberated, independent, and capable of assuming her own role in politics, society, and the sciences. Her choice of a mate will be determined by compatibility rather than by expedience, by genuine love, rather than a search for security. Of course, education and the liberalization of divorce laws are essential in bringing about the change."

I once asked her if she planned to get married. "Since I don't regard marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman, I would only be able to fall in love with a creative man who would challenge and stimulate me intellectually, one who has a high code of ethics and who would place spiritual values above material ones."

Edith has contempt for girls who look forward to a housewife's role. "I fail to see the glamor and challenge of scrubbing floors, washing dishes, and cooking. Perhaps girls who look forward to being housewives are unwilling or incapable of developing their intellectual faculties. With the rapid progress of technology these menial tasks will be fully automated anyway."

Once an interviewer asked her, "How about boys? Do you meet them?"

"Yes, I meet boys. Florida Atlantic is a coed school. As of the moment, however, I have no matrimonial plans. First, I want to get my Ph.D."

Another common question was, "Would you raise your children the way your father raised you?"

"Yes, I would. Most definitely. If I marry, my husband will have to consent to rearing our children as I was."

"Would you recommend his methods to others?"

"Absolutely yes, provided that the parent possesses a high degree of culture and a commitment to this goal. I can't say for sure how much others will benefit from it since I am the first product of the program. However, I do know that the intellectual horizons of a child can be greatly expanded, edging out the mediocrity and lust for comfort which are so commonplace in our society."

"Truthfully, are you happy, Edith? Are you well-accepted socially? Does the age difference constitute an obstacle?"

"I have been perfectly happy for as far back as I can remember. My social life is rich and full. The age difference creates no

obstacles at all. I am completely at ease with people, and judging by the way my schoolmates treat me, the feeling is fully reciprocated."

"What is your aim in life, as a woman and as an individual?"

"I am a woman in a biological sense only. I seek no privileges nor will I tolerate restrictions. I abhor distinctions bestowed through marriage, such as a First Lady. The society will have to judge me on the basis of my merits and my merits alone. In marriage, I shall seek mutual respect and affection, compatibility and challenge. This is my definition of marital happiness."

Once during a press interview at Florida Atlantic University the fourteen year old Edith introduced her twenty-two year old roommate, majoring in education, with the following comment: "Within a month she will graduate to teach lots of my age at a junior high school. Simultaneously, I shall teach students of her age higher mathematics at Michigan State University."

Although the affidavit on *To Tell The Truth* had presented our story correctly, the press continued to distort it. Of the many misconceptions printed, I most resented the ones which portrayed me as a cruel, strict father. Instead of being a rigid disciplinarian, I was extremely permissive. As a child she had on several occasions hurt me in anger and once she destroyed some of our furniture. On another occasion, she intentionally broke three windows in our house. I had them repaired without a comment.

One evening in May, 1968, while Edith was at Florida Atlantic, I received a telephone call from a radio station in San Francisco. The caller requested an interview with me, explaining that an UPI release about Edith's scholastic triumphs had appeared in the *Chronicle* that morning. He said the story had created a great deal of interest, resulting in many calls to the station. Reluctantly I agreed. When we were on the air, he introduced me as Edith's "Demanding Dad" from the article. As it was reported in the story, "He based his training on four things: discipline, diligence, motivation, and speed." Then he continued, "The residents of the Bay area are shocked by your cruel methods employed on a baby. Is it possible that incarceration in concentration camps has so dehumanized you?" David, who was on the extension line remarked sarcastically, "My Dad's cruelty prompted him to become a vegetarian."

Once I received a call from an Associated Press Editor in New York. "Mr. Stern, to separate the facts from fiction, I would

like to send one of my most gifted reporters, for an interview with Edith and your family. I know you are annoyed by the inaccuracies and exaggerations about your daughter, my man will do an in-depth penetrating story to set the record straight."

"I'll do my best to arrange it. Give me a few days to get Edith's consent."

"He'll be there in four days."

The next four days were devoted to bargaining and persuasion. "Edith, darling, this man is a famous reporter. He won't be tempted toward melodrama. I think that a true picture of you will emerge from this interview."

"Dad, I don't care. Having read all the lies printed about me, I really don't care what the world thinks about me. The answer is 'no'."

I called the editor back and advised him that I was unable to arrange the interview. "Mr. Stern," he replied, my reporter is a charming fellow. He will reach her somehow."

"Fine, but do it at your own risk."

In May of 1968, the newspaperman called from the airport and asked me to meet him that morning at Florida Atlantic.

"Don't underestimate Edith," I told him. "She's tough."

At first we could not find Edith, but finally I saw her strolling with a young man. "Edith, meet my friend," I introduced the journalist.

She politely greeted him. "How do you do, sir."

"Where can we talk?"

"Right here. Let's sit on the grass," replied Edith.

The accompanying camera man was out of sight. The reporter was charming. But nothing could persuade her. "I really don't care for publicity."

"Edith, these people spent a lot of money to send this gentleman here."

"I have made my views clear. I refuse to be cajoled or bribed." The reporter, who most likely had learned from the numerous press accounts about Edith's admiration for the *Star Trek* tele-

vision series, cleverly told her, "Young lady, you are as stubborn as Spock in the last *Star Trek* episode."

That excited her. "So you are a *Star Trek* fan too."

"Yes, I am."

She smiled at him. "One who watches *Star Trek* cannot be altogether bad."

After that the reporter had no difficulty. We spent a delightful day together, ending with a dinner at one of the best restaurants in Boca Raton. There we met Edith's mathematics professor. Knowing that Edith avoided such places, he remarked, "This is the last place on earth I would expect to find you."

"It is with the compliments of the fourth branch of government, the all mighty press, that I, a little pauper, can be found here."

"So you finally granted an interview?"

"How can one deny a *Star Trek* fan?"

While eating in fancy restaurants was a rare event for Edith, she could frequently be found in establishments offering more modest cuisines. Once when I was visiting her, she suggested that we go out to eat. "Dad, I know a place where you can obtain all the fish you can eat for a dollar nineteen."

While as a vegetarian, I was not particularly impressed, I replied, "Fine. Let's go."

A friend of hers joined us. As I watched Edith devouring additional portions of fish, again and again, I couldn't help but wonder if her food absorption wasn't greater than her intellectual capacity. Reading my thoughts, she whispered, "Food in the university cafeteria is so lousy. We eat here every Wednesday."

"I wonder how long the poor guy will remain in business."

"Don't worry, Dad. This is his contribution to better education. Besides, he has six other days to heal his wounds, for this deal is offered only on Wednesdays."

Edith completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in August 1968. Since the graduation exercises had been held earlier, she was scheduled to attend the ceremonies the following year. However, she objected to attending exercises under any circumstances. Further she had decided to attend graduate school at

Michigan State University—a distance of 1700 miles—which made it unlikely that she would return for the graduation.

Branding such ceremonies as "empty symbolism," she adamantly stated, "I will not parade down the aisle wearing grotesque attire in a circus-like parade."

"But Edith," I argued, "this is sort of a milestone signifying a major educational attainment. Your mother and I would be proud and happy if you were to attend it."

"Dad, I plan to pursue my education. You seem to overestimate my degree. I have earned it, as you know, effortlessly. It is not much of an achievement. Since when do you, a proponent of non-conformity, subscribe to this middle class philosophy?"

Edith was of course right and there was no point in arguing with her. Graduation exercises, or formalities of any nature for that matter, meant very little to me and Edith knew it. There was no sense in pretending. I simply wanted to co-operate with the university which had been so kind to Edith. Not long before, the registrar had confided to me over lunch that while other colleges suffered from a lack of facilities, FAU's greatest problem was a lack of applicants. When I had difficulty believing it, he explained that because it was a new and not well known state university, rather distant from population centers, students were not familiar with it. Further, FAU is the only university in the state system that by design did not have freshmen and sophomore classes. Hence, the university had only 3700 students in facilities capable of handling 10,000 to 12,000.

I had a great deal of affection for Florida Atlantic University which, in my judgment, has an excellent faculty—many of whom are my friends. The school had been very helpful to Edith and its president, had secured a generous scholarship grant for her. "Don't ask any questions about where it comes from," I was told when I inquired about the source. Since the registrar had also told me that the publicity associated with Edith's attendance at the school had been an asset to them (they had received several hundred letters from everywhere in this country and abroad as a result), I was determined to arrange publicity so that the school would further benefit from her graduation. When I failed to persuade Edith to attend the ceremonies, I made other arrangements.

Shortly thereafter, and not so coincidentally, the wire services

pestered me over the telephone. "What about Edith? When will she graduate?" I explained that she had already graduated. "When will the exercises be held?" they asked. "We would like to take some pictures and arrange an interview."

A decision was soon reached. Edith would have a private graduation ceremony in the office of the president with only a few selected guests present. The news was "discreetly" released to UPI.

Edith was outraged. "I will not attend this circus! I refuse to wear the garb! Someday I will donate a scholarship to a deserving student in appreciation for the generous grant given me, rather than parade for the press. Please, Dad, I like this school and its faculty, but don't force this ceremony on me."

Finally, after much persuasion, she capitulated. "Well Dad, it is obvious that I have no choice but to go, however, I refuse to wear the cap and gown."

At the scheduled time, David, Edith, and I went in to the office of the president. Bella was unable to attend the ceremony because of illness. Selected school officials, a student photographer, and a wire service reporter were there also. Edith finally consented to put on the gown of the dean of faculty who always kept it handy in his office.

After the graduation formalities were over, she was warmly congratulated. When Edith posed reluctantly for pictures, the president asked David, "What about you? When will you go to college?"

"It would be presumptuous on my part to make a definite commitment, but I am confident that I shall surpass my sister by entering college at an earlier age," replied the seven-year-old boy.

The UPI reporter, disbelieving his ears, began to ask David questions. David's answers were well chosen while he displayed remarkable articulation.

"He's a genius. Two geniuses in one family. Please repeat for me the statement you made to the President."

David obliged him by repeating the statement word for word. A day or two later the American and world press reported the graduation ceremony and quoted David's statement verbatim. Screaming headlines proclaimed a "Second Genius in the Family." Thus David stole the show. Edith was at home "recovering from

the pageant." Pointing to the many newspaper accounts, she smilingly remarked, "We pride ourselves as being the country of peaceful transition. David, with my blessing, will be reigning now."

# CHAPTER 13

## *Fifteen-Year-Old Professor*

At last the hoped for and dreaded day arrived. Edith was to leave for Michigan State University to begin her graduate studies in mathematics and to assume her role as a university instructor—the youngest in history. Waiting for this day had been trying for all of us. Many thoughts crossed my mind during the long, sleepless nights.

Will she succeed? How can I permit a fifteen-year-old girl to leave her parents for such a long journey? How will she be able to conduct university classes? She is still a child. Will her youthfulness interfere with her duties? Will the older students respect her? How will she adapt herself to the cold climate? Her wardrobe is so skimpy. Won't she be cold?

In my mind rang the warning of the New York physician who had prescribed penicillin for the rest of her life. Had I been wrong in overriding him? He had said to keep her warm at all times and suggested that we relocate to a warm climate to help prevent a recurrence of rheumatic fever. Won't the transition now from a warm to a cold climate cause her trouble?

How will she be able to manage her budget? She is only taking seventy-five dollars with her.

Perhaps the prophets of doom were right. Perhaps she will fall flat on her face. This could be catastrophic to her.

Bella, who was delighted by Edith's remarkable success in college, chose to be silent, but her eyes betrayed a deep maternal fear. I knew she was having the same doubts.

"Daddy, don't be worried; you have given me self-reliance,

broadened my cultural horizons, and introduced me to values which I shall always treasure. Have no fear. I'll pass this test too with flying colors. It is you I am worried about. You are so engrossed in my progress. Believe me, in spite of the distance, I shall always be at your side. Remember, you have David to work with."

"Edith, I have not said one word to suggest apprehension. I have full faith in you."

"Let's be frank. Verbal communication is superfluous for us. I can easily sense your concern."

To reassure myself, I thought of the many steps I had taken to advance her education, to prepare her for this day. Fifteen years had elapsed since I had told the nurses at the hospital that she was destined to be a genius, and now she had exceeded my most ambitious expectations. Why should she fail now? But since parents are destined to worry, there was no way I could lift this burden from my heart.

"Edith, I shall always be as near as the telephone. If anything goes wrong, simply lift the receiver or come home at once. Remember, most youngsters of your age are just entering high school. They have no responsibilities."

Bella was in tears, hugging Edith and unable to speak. As the plane carrying my beloved child disappeared into the sky, I felt that a part of me had died. I couldn't help feeling that my life had suddenly become empty, for not only was Edith my daughter and dearest companion, but I also realized that I had perhaps egotistically tried to fulfill myself through her accomplishments, a sin of which most parents are guilty to some extent.

As we drove home from the airport, Bella reminded me, "We still have David. Please restrain yourself from your genies making so that he remains with us longer."

The press was determined to cover Edith's story at Michigan State. Before her departure, reporters called her long distance to plead for interviews when she arrived in Lansing. She reluctantly agreed.

Shortly after her arrival, *The Detroit Free Press* ran a story which said in part:

"... are you, as some educators claim, the 'victim' of your father's concepts of 'total educational submersion'?

"Now you are really away from home for the first time and you've caught a cold and you worry a bit about whether you'll be able to draw a straight line on the board if you have to teach freshman algebra.

"Will you sink or swim?

"Right now, you seem to be paddling right along."

Worried, we called her.

"How are you doing, sweetheart?"

"Just fine, Dad."

"We read the story in the *Free Press* with apprehension."

"The exaggeration is in the best tradition of journalism, Dad."

Edith embarked on her career as a college instructor without fear. On the day of her first class, she confidently went to her room. One glance at the students convinced them that she meant business. Her youth was neither an asset nor a liability, since her deportment was consistent with her duties.

She blended into the huge university without fanfare, enjoying the comfort of relative anonymity. All requests for interviews had to be, by her own decision, cleared with the chairman of the mathematics department who seldom granted them. While her phone was unlisted, Edith's social life was full and rich. She attended concerts, availed herself of campus cultural activities, had many friends of both sexes, and successfully pursued her work in her dual capacity of instructor and graduate student.

At Christmas vacation after her first fall there, I asked her how it felt to make a debut as a college instructor at her age.

"Well Daddy, at first I was kind of scared. Then in the privacy of my room, I calmly and objectively assessed the situation. I concluded I possess the knowledge and the students are here to learn. Age differences or other considerations are totally irrelevant. I simply entered the class in a business-like manner, at ease, and began my lecture."

"Have you encountered any problems at all related to your age?"

"Really nothing of consequence. A few of my students petitioned me to improve their grades, but soon realized how firm I was."

One day, following my lecture at an university, I was delighted to meet a transfer student from Michigan State University.

"Have you taken math at MSU?"

"Yes, I did."

"Who was your instructor?"

The student mentioned a name which I have forgotten.

"Well I know a young lady who is teaching mathematics there. Her name is Edith Stern. No relative of mine," I quickly added.

"Oh yes, she's a tough cooky. My friend took her classes. Brother, is she demanding. No wonder her name is Stern."

"Is she really as young as the press reported?"

"Most likely not. How could a sixteen-year-old child reach such a level?" he answered.

"Well I guess you are right. The press cannot be trusted."

Once when she came home to visit, I asked Edith if she would like to meet with some of her former school friends. "Frankly, no. What do I have in common with them? Also meeting them would be embarrassing since some have just graduated from high school." Nevertheless, she inquired, "How are Michael, and Mary? Did Leon secure a scholarship? Do you know where Arnold moved to?"

The only childhood friend whom she has and meets occasionally when she comes home is Mark, who is Edith's age and who attended two grades with her. As I recall he was as bright, or brighter than she when they were in the second grade together. I worked with both of them during our field trips and found Mark no less receptive than Edith; in fact, in many instances his interest in the sciences impressed me very favorably. She was close to him when they were children, but the friendship ended when we moved to Indiana. After we returned to Florida they would occasionally meet. When she graduated from Florida Atlantic he was still in the tenth grade, although as an outstanding student attending honor classes. When meeting Mark, Edith nostalgically reminisces about the bygone days, but truthfully, they have little in common. When I suggested that we invite him to her graduation at Miami-Dade Junior College, she consented, but added, "Dad, the boy is so very young."

At Michigan State, Edith has many friends and she loves them.

Some of them are single, others are married; some are exotic and others are regular American kids. Her friends include a Catholic priest, a nun, and several foreign exchange students—whose language and customs fascinate her. She once shared a suite with a Chinese girl from Taiwan who now is a biology professor and who has invited Edith to Taiwan to visit her. Her other roommate was a black girl from Alabama and earlier, other white American girls. One of her friends is a young man who had to interrupt his work on his doctorate when his wife became unexpectedly pregnant; he took a job in a small college in Michigan. Edith likes them both and frequently visits them on weekends. She shares her faculty office at Michigan with seven other instructors where they have a ball playing practical jokes on each other and celebrate the completion of a term with a bottle of champagne.

In many ways Edith is a typical member of her generation. Like other people her age, she is fun loving. She will laugh her head off at movies such as *Twelve Chairs*, clown playing baseball during a faculty picnic, and giggle carefreely reading *Mad Magazine* or a *Playboy* book of jokes. She loves exotic foods, sternly scolds a friend for not returning her science fiction books, unashamedly sheds a tear reading *Love Story*, cheerfully plays in the snow with her fellow graduate students, and exchanges salty jokes. On weekends, she may visit with friends on their Ohio farm and then ride all night on a bus back to Michigan.

Edith's clothing is very simple. In regards to dress, she points out that there are two considerations, aesthetics and the utilitarian aspects. So she buys inexpensive dresses, disregarding the fashion trends. "I shall not let anyone dictate to me what to wear," she declares. "These are the advantages of being a homo sapiens."

Once I attempted to discard her worn out sandals. She fiercely yelled, "Don't do it. I'm attached to my sandals." I protested that she had worn them for the past three years and that they looked atrocious. "I don't give a damn what others think," she shouted. "I love and wear them to my classes."

In her somewhat Spartan upbringing, Edith learned self-discipline and to subordinate emotions to logic, the basic ingredient of scientific objectivity. When pursuing a worthy objective, she has a single-minded dedication. She rejects comfort, expediency, or complacency. As to the power of mind over matter, she practices it so effectively that when she broke her foot, she did not seek medical attention until the next day, after prodding by friends.

When I found out about it, I asked Edith how she could neglect such an injury. "Well, I had very little pain. Besides I had exams to study for." The doctor, however, did not agree with her; in his opinion, she must have had a great deal of pain.

Similarly, Edith's dentist was astonished over the way she endured the pain caused by a mouthful of cavities. Edith claimed that she had no pain or discomfort, to which the dentist replied, "Impossible."

During the summer of 1969, Edith spent her vacation at home. In order to supplement her income she accepted a position with IBM. The *Miami News* reported in a headline, "IBM gets smart—hires human computer Edith." The story began with "That mechanical genius of the computers, IBM, is about to come eyeball to eyeball with its human counterpart, 16-year-old Edith Stern. The result may well be a standoff. At the very least, it will set the machine pulsating."

In order to comply with the law, Edith, a minor, had to obtain working papers from the local Board of Education, in order to render services as a scientist. To me, this was a magnificent triumph over the sickenning mediocrity.

Edith is a seasoned traveler. As a student, she obtains a fifty percent discount on her flights on a standby basis. Once, en route home from Michigan, she was bumped off in Cleveland where she spent a day and a half in the airport reading books, totally oblivious of the passing time. Finally, I called the airport and secured a seat for her.

"It really was comfortable. The airport is well heated. I had the opportunity to read without interference. There were many students at the counter, most of them trying to get home for Christmas. I felt they should have the priority. After all I am Jewish."

"But how about your parents worrying to death?"

"What was there to worry about? You knew the plane arrived safely in Cleveland."

"Couldn't you call us?" "I was reading and simply forgot," apologetically remarked Edith.

On another occasion, although suffering from chickenpox, she decided not to postpone her trip home. In spite of the rash on her face she was able to enter the plane. Then she spent almost the whole trip in the rest room in order to protect the

passengers from the disease. Some women attempting to enter the comfort room became alarmed since it was constantly occupied. Finally, they summoned a stewardess who broke in. She screamed when she saw Edith whose face and arms were covered with a bright red rash. The stewardess led her to a seat while the whole aisle was deserted.

I was at the airport waiting for her arrival. Since I had been unable to persuade her to enter a hospital in Michigan, I had arranged a room for her in a Miami Beach hospital.

"I shall not go to a hospital. Take me home."

"But you are sick and contagious."

"Dad, I am awful homesick. Put me in isolation at home."

Soon David caught it. They had a fine time convalescing together.

When she comes home from Michigan, Edith enjoys frolicking with her family. During our frequent trips to the beach, our favorite retreat is a lifeguard's elevated stool. We climb into it in the evening, deeply inhaling the fresh air, while gazing into the blue Atlantic. Edith explains to David "the mysteries of nature" and he in turn lectures her on marine life, a subject on which he has become somewhat of an expert. Like many other teenagers, Edith likes to swim far from the shore. When I call to her to come back she flashes me a peace sign and yells, "I am safe. I swim well."

At home, Edith, like other sisters, teases her brother, and sometimes it climaxes in a good natured fight. On other occasions, she may challenge him to a bicycle race around the lake, often beating him. She can cleverly con him in a game of Monopoly, but she invariably loses to him in chess.

Upon her return home, she immediately removes her many awards and diplomas from the wall — to the chagrin of her parents. She once attempted to destroy her honorary diploma from North Miami High School. "Apparently the Board of Education feels guilty for the indignities to which we were subjected when you fought for my release from junior high school. Thus, to appease us, they awarded me this honorary diploma. What a farce. What stupidity."

As always, Edith remains an avid reader. Her first trip while on vacation is to the book store in search for "gems." Her library is catalogued and entrusted to David's loving care while she is in

school. Of course she loves music and has two collections of fine classical records, one at home and the other in Michigan. During one summer, she left her stereo, records, and some books with a girl friend in Michigan. The girl was evicted and Edith's priceless possessions disappeared. She never recovered her things and was bitter about it.

During her visits, she likes to tease me. Once she said, "Dad, I will give you two days to define topology intelligently." Topology is one of her specialties.

"I cannot even comprehend what it is. The nearest I can come to it is topography." I know practically nothing about mathematics.

"Very funny," Edith responded.

"This is really the truth. Had you studied medicine, law, sociology, psychology, or almost any other field, I could at least follow your progress. But, of all the subjects you had to choose theoretical mathematics so as to deliberately keep me out."

"One must conquer the unconquerable, otherwise there would be no challenge. Remember, a teacher once told me that I would never master mathematics. This was a challenge. It was also important for me to cut the umbilical cord from you. Otherwise, perhaps I would be studying medicine today. Anyway I might try for an M.D. after I obtain my Ph.D. in math."

Edith is quite interested in world affairs and her dedication to the ideals of social justice are deeply ingrained. She is opposed to war and violence and passionately campaigned for Eugene McCarthy in the 1968 presidential primaries. In fact, she utilized her press interviews and TV appearances to promote him.

Once during a radio appearance Edith was asked to comment on the Middle East crisis. "As a Jew, I'm in sympathy and in full accord with the heroic struggle of Israel to stay alive in the face of formidable adversaries dedicated to her destruction. But I'm also fully cognizant of the plight of Arab refugees who are so mercilessly being exploited by the Arab states. Thus any settlement in the Middle East will have to provide financial means to compensate these unfortunate ones."

The interviewer, who was pro-Israel, interrupted, "Isn't it true that the Arab states have persecuted the Jewish inhabitants, confiscated their wealth, and forced them to flee for their lives?"

"That might be so, but in my judgment two wrongs do not constitute a right, no more than the North Vietnamese cruelties justify My Lai."

Edith can also have a good time pursuing causes. One day she called home from Michigan and since she sounded hoarse, I asked her if she had a cold. "No Dad," she replied. "I just returned from the state capital. We were demonstrating for the liberalization of abortion laws. It is a good cause and a lot of fun to scream and to clear one's lungs out on a chilly spring day."

"I can hear some giggling in your room. Who's there with you?"

"It is Sister Anna. She just arrived from the convent to receive her Ph.D. She will sleep over with me."

"Does she approve of your views on abortion?"

"Of course," Edith said. "She's liberal."

Religion plays an important part in her life, but it is religion based on intellectual perception, not emotional ritualism. Man can only love and serve God through his relationship to other human beings. There is no way to appease God through prayer or supplication. Religion must be militant. Social justice is what counts. God's battles are to be fought in Mississippi rather than in ornate temples and cathedrals. The rest is deception and self-perpetuation for the sake of comfort and pleasure.

Edith likes to quote the philosopher, Martin Buber:

The annihilation of six million Jews is a great tragedy, but even greater is the fact that the whole Christian world stood by indifferent while this unparalleled act of genocide was perpetrated.

An interviewer once asked, "Edith, what are the alternatives?"

"Struggle, involvement, purpose in life, establishment of ethical values."

"Did you say restoration or establishment of moral values?"

"I was unequivocal. I said establishment of moral values. Mankind has been always decadent as far as one can trace human history. However in an age of military and scientific sophistication, it becomes a matter of life or death. We shall learn to live together or perish." Edith had made the same statement when she was five years old.

In 1970 Edith was awarded her master's degree in theoretic mathematics from MSU. That summer she worked at Eastern Airlines in the computer department to replenish her depleted funds. Once I visited her at Eastern headquarters. She met me at the security booth, obtained a pass for me, and then lead me through a labyrinth of halls into her spacious office. On her desk were a few pieces of paper and a pencil. She casually scribbled some notes and I asked her if that was all that she did. "Indeed," she replied, "there is not much challenge here. I'm simply relaxing in boredom. I really don't know why they pay me so much money."

Later, I spoke to the manager of the computer science division, who assured me that Edith provided a very complex service to the company, and as a temporarily employed scientist she was greatly underpaid. "I wish you could persuade her to accept a steady position. Her income would double and she and her family would obtain flight privileges. Then she could take a leave of absence and continue her studies." I told him that she would never interrupt her studies. Then I asked how she related to her co-workers, all of whom were much older. "Quite well. No problems at all. They are all fond of her." Before she returned to Michigan, the division gave her a send off party.

Edith, who has fulfilled at eighteen almost all requirements leading to a Ph.D. in theoretical mathematics, could have had her doctorate earlier if she had obtained a fellowship which would have enabled her to take more courses. This, however, she adamantly refuses to do, to the chagrin of her family.

"I regard a grant as totally unethical, inasmuch as the recipient renders no service in return for the money." Then she adds in a less pensive mood, "Besides, teaching gives me such great satisfaction."

There are critics still fixed in their prejudices who argue that I have victimized Edith with my educational program. While they are willing to admit that she is academically superior, they believe that since her intellect has been developed, she must be deficient in some other aspect such as personality, emotional maturity, or social relationships. They find it difficult to accept that she is a well-rounded, happy person.

It is true that Edith possesses an insatiable desire for learning which I hope will not end with the attainment of her Ph.D. Similarly, she adheres to high standards of ethics and personal integrity and has a passionate commitment to the ideals of social justice.

But it is also true that she is always cheerful. She once said, "I really have not found anyone as happy as I am. I attain effortlessly all the goals which I have set for myself."

Her emotional stability is remarkable. She easily and readily adapts to any environment whether it is the university, IBM, or Eastern Airlines. To the best of my knowledge Edith has never resorted to drugs and she suffers from no frustrations. At Michigan State, she abruptly stopped smoking when told her lungs were congested.

A psychology professor once asked me about her sex life. I replied, "I really don't know about it. No parent of an unmarried daughter can ask such a question unless she chooses to discuss it. If she is promiscuous, she becomes pregnant and it becomes obvious. None of this is true in Edith's case."

I have been accused of casting her in my own mold. While we share many common values, we certainly do not have an identity of views. She has chosen a field of study which is so remote from my own that I do not understand the nature of her research.

She successfully relates to others as witnessed by meaningful social ties. Her roommates have always respected her highly, and Edith is quite successful as a teacher. She is deeply attached to her parents and her brother. When we had a financial crisis, she enlisted the aid of a co-signer and borrowed a thousand dollars for us from the university credit union.

In spite of frequent predictions to the contrary by educators, Edith, a product of the Total Educational Submersion method, is a cheerful and well functioning, happy individual.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### ***Do We Really Care to Improve Education***

In pursuing my educational program, I have continually struggled with the schools, listening while teachers and principals charged that Edith and David were unintelligent and uninspired, watching as my children attended school year after year, hopelessly bored by the mediocre pace and lack of challenge. I can draw one conclusion only: our school system is flagrantly inadequate.

My work with David and Edith has been in many ways the antithesis of what they encountered in school. I worked with them on individual levels, guiding, probing, urging them on to new heights. From their early infancy, I stressed the importance and significance of education and knowledge. When they had questions, I helped them find answers; when they were interested in something, I helped them to explore it. I fear that if I had been indoctrinated in a teachers' college their accomplishments would have been quite meager. Fortunately, I was free from the inhibitions and dogmas which flourish in the schools and often retard, rather than promote, the educational process. It is against this background that I sincerely hope that my children's experiences and achievements will become a significant aspect of the educational debate in this country.

One cannot deny that our educational system at best fails to meet the challenges of our dynamic, industrial society. The failure appears to be even greater for the exciting promises of tomorrow. In our affluent society teaching this very noble profession, is financially unrewarding and often commands very little status or respect. In many cases, teacher education attracts the least promising appli-

cants, frequently including those who have failed to meet the higher standards of admission required by the other colleges and branches of the universities. Talented young men and women, with the exception of some very dedicated ones, prefer other professions where social prestige, remuneration, and the opportunity for advancement are much higher. In teacher colleges, the students are taught methodology often to the detriment of subject matter. Thus, we frequently end up with teachers who have very little knowledge in the content area which they are supposed to teach.

Many schools are overcrowded with thirty to forty students per teacher. In some places, school discipline is totally lacking. Quite often teaching requires an act of personal courage in the face of physical danger. The school curriculum is frequently out of date and, as a result, out of step with the requirements of an industrial society. Athletic activities usually obtain more recognition and a larger share of the appropriation than academic ones. Parental involvement through the P.T.A. is superficial with a strong emphasis on trivis, parties, outings, and parades.

Boards of education, under whose direct jurisdiction the schools are placed, are often comprised of poorly educated, but influential people who at times retard the school's progress rather than help it. The nearly pathological fear of federal intervention has repeatedly hampered much needed financial assistance, while many communities, in their short-sighted desire to prevent greater taxation, defeat bond issues, needed to aid education.

It would seem that a prime goal of American education is to preserve the *status quo*, yet such preservation is the greatest deterrent to our progress. Many school administrators at all levels frown upon innovation, which they feel challenges their competence, compels them to adapt themselves to a new set of circumstances, and thus undermines their security. The bastion of this opposition is centered in the teachers' colleges whose very survival would be placed in jeopardy if the anachronistic and inefficient curriculum and methodology were discarded.

Where improvements and innovations do take place, it is often in ways which miss the main point of the problem in education. It is analogous to organized religion which in searching for magnitude and splendor, builds elaborate temples and cathedrals, losing sight of the central theme—God, himself. Similarly, our schools have grown in size and complexity while the quality of education has declined rapidly. The ancient Talmudic sages maintained, and justly so, that, "The only thing that counts in education is the

desire to learn and the dedication and competence of the teacher." Thus, Edith and David's education at home was not with fancy gadgets and expensive instructional aids; rather their school was the world. Everyday objects and events provided the basis for exciting learning experiences, the key being a successful use of the sights and sounds which surrounded them. The schools, however, often act as though one more gadget or one more teaching aid will provide satisfactory substitutes for the desire to learn and the quality of the teacher.

What can we as parents and citizens do to improve education? As parents we can broaden our children's cultural horizons, introduce them to research, debate with them, discuss the events of the day, and in general set a worthy example. This will require that we spend time with them in intellectual activities, working to develop their brains as they develop their muscles. Remember that no more than ten to fifteen percent of the intellectual capacity of the human brain is being developed—the rest is literally being wasted. It would be beneficial also to curb their habitual and often indiscriminate television viewing—particularly since so much of television programming is worthless trivia, often glorifying crime. Of course, curbing television viewing may require parents to overcome their own addiction to T.V.

As citizens, we can insist that the establishment improve education. I urge everyone to insist on quality education which is responsible to the needs and intellectual growth of the child. Since the people pay for the schools, they have every right to demand that the schools do an excellent job, that the schools should be accountable just as a business is. However, I have been waging such a fight for many years with a striking lack of success. As reported in previous chapters, I have lectured across the nation and in Europe, made statements to the press, discussed education with local, state, and national educational administrators, and sought to secure funds to demonstrate how education can be improved, but all my efforts have been in vain, meeting eloquent silence at best.

My last such effort began in the fall of 1970 when, as I was casually glancing through the pages of the *Miami Herald*, an unusual notice attracted my attention. The Florida Senate Committee on Primary and Secondary Education was scheduled to conduct a public hearing aimed at the "improvement of the quality of education." Although my numerous proposals for changes in the school curriculum and methodology which had been directed to the State Department of Education and the various boards of edu-

cation had been totally ignored in the past, I felt it was my duty again to expose the inadequacies of public education and to propose changes based upon my successfully tested methods.

The climate in Florida seemed better for change than ever before. In particular, I was gratified by the changes which had occurred in the political situation in the state. A young, dynamic governor had just been elected and his proposed sweeping fiscal reforms impressed me. Further, an influx of youthful, energetic, and generally well-educated people was now in both houses of the state legislature and even a few such young people had secured seats in the cabinet. I hoped that these changes heralded a new era for Florida's outdated school system.

The cold, if not outright hostile, treatment given to me by the assistant school superintendent when I inquired about the details of the hearing did not dampen my enthusiasm. As one who had acquired the distinction of being a resented person by the school establishment, I was fully aware that my presence at the hearing would be less than welcome.

The day of the hearing arrived and the meeting was called to order. Soon it became apparent that the speakers at the hearing were preoccupied with concerns other than the quality of education. In spite of the obvious failures of the public school system, failures which place the very survival of society in jeopardy, not one speaker addressed himself to the issue at hand. As though totally oblivious of the crisis and the purpose of the hearing, the speakers could have been talking at a General Motors and United Auto Workers contract bargaining session or at a city commission meeting dealing with garbage disposal. One speaker, representing a teacher's union, requested collective bargaining rights. Another, on behalf of a rival union, demanded equal representation. An official spoke about pension funds.

Finally, I took the floor. "Gentlemen, I hope that you share my shock. These hearings were meant to deal with the improvement of education at a time of crisis, yet none of the speakers who have appeared here, people who have one hand in the taxpayers' pocket, have addressed themselves to the issue at hand. These are the very people whose lack of competence contributes to the failures of our school system and whose income is derived from school taxes.

"It is indeed tragic that I, of all the speakers, the only one who never sought a penny for my efforts, address myself to the issue and submit proposals for a dynamic school system based

on a successfully tested educational method. As legislators, parents, and taxpayers, I hope that you will in your wisdom support and implement my proposals. I stand ready to serve you in any capacity."

When the hearings were over, one of the senators approached me. "Don't think that we turn a deaf ear to you. We visit schools and we are aware of their crisis, and above all we are determined to meet it. I for one, am interested in your proposals. Let's get together."

I was in a joyful mood as my tiny Volkswagen sped along at the maximum speed limit on my way to see the senator. Perhaps now, I felt, after years of bitter struggle, my long cherished dream will be fulfilled. Times are changing; the torch is passing from the old worn out generation to the young impatient one. Clichés are making way for new concepts and ideas.

Just a week before, I had been warmly received at Nova University, a new, dynamic graduate school in Broward County. After my lecture to the Behavioral Science faculty and graduate students, my host, Dr. John Flynn, asked how many of the people present would entrust their children to me. Almost everyone raised a hand. This, I felt, was not merely courtesy, but rather an emphatic vote of confidence. Further, there was no bitter opposition on the part of the professional educators as I had been accustomed to encounter at many universities. Thus, I was hopeful that Nova would be willing to cooperate with me in demonstrating my educational methods.

The meeting with the senator was very cordial and informative. He kindly assured me that my proposals were sound and advised me that there would be \$1,200,000 available that year for research and development in education in Florida. He said that in his judgment, no project had more merit than the demonstration school which I had proposed. I explained to him my frustrations with the school administrators in the state, that I was convinced that the State Department of Education was determined to preserve the status quo at any price, and that it would make every effort to kill my proposal. In their judgment, I said there is nothing wrong with the school system. The senator however, felt that times had changed and that the people were no longer tolerating complacency and incompetence. Encouraged, I thanked him and departed.

As I expected, Dr. Flynn, on behalf of Nova University, consented to undertake the scientific evaluation and to provide

assistance in the implementation of my proposed school. Similarly, the administrator of the Nova public school complex adjacent to Nova University, expressed his delight in my program and offered to house my school. Shortly afterwards, I sent a proposal to the State Department of Education.

Weeks went by and I did not receive even so much as an acknowledgement of my proposals. Finally, an UPI story headlined, "Plan to Rate Pupil Learning Called OK for 19th Century," reported on the disposition of \$1,200,000. It had been designated for research and development. The money was to be used to measure how well students learn. In the article, the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee was quoted, "They are archaic in their view. Eight percent of the things they are measuring are not how well somebody learns, but things like how many teachers per student, how many square feet, toilet facilities."

In my judgment, this perfidious act bordered on criminal conspiracy. Unable to restrain my indignation, I called the State Department of Education and after a frustrated search for the superintendent, a bureaucrat picked up the receiver. "Whatever happened to my proposals for a demonstration school?" I inquired.

"They were unanimously rejected," the official replied nonchalantly.

"On what grounds?"

"It was felt that they would destroy the moral fiber of our youth."

"You can't be serious?"

"Indeed I am. But more importantly, we are quite pleased with the high standards of public education in Florida and see no need to reform it."

Choked with tears, I terminated this futile conversation.

That evening, Edith called from Michigan. "Have you heard yet about your proposals, Dad?"

"They were rejected, my child."

"How will the \$1,200,000 of research funds be spent?"

"According to UPI, to study how well students learn, a plan which according to the article is obsolete before it ever gets off the drawing board."

"Dad, it is common knowledge that our schools fail miserably. Why do they spend money to study it? What a waste."

"Prepare yourself for another shock, Edith. Eight percent of these funds or about \$100,000 will be designated to study such things as the ratio of students to toilets."

"Apart from the fact that such a study is totally irrelevant to the school crisis, I would compute it for a fee of \$50 or less. Better yet, I would do it for nothing if someone will convince me that such information will advance the cause of education," replied Edith.

Thus once more my efforts to improve education were cynically defeated.

The main part of the proposals are included here in a slightly edited form. They clearly and succinctly state the total educational submersion method, its philosophy and objectives.

## OVERVIEW

"Total Educational Submersion" refers to a method of education in which the student is an integral part of the instructional program. A brief synopsis of the method is provided by the following excerpts of a letter dated January 13, 1971, written to Mr. William Cecil Golden, Associate Commissioner by Dr. John M. Flynn, Associate Professor, Nova University:

"His (Stern's) approach to education has two logical components which probably should be considered separately. One is his methodology and the other is his priority or value structure about what should and should not be included in the curriculum. People, who disagree with the content of this latter component should not let it interfere with objectively examining his teaching methods.

"The methodology is basically an individualized instruction approach—one which takes the child where it finds him, capitalizes on the child's interests, and uses as instructional materials both books and the environment. In many respects, his method is not new; it resembles Dewey's in some ways and certainly parallels many modern trends such as individualized instruction, relevance of learning, and to some extent, contingency management and discovery learning. On the other hand, I believe that it incorporates a flexibility

which is not often present in other current approaches. For example, the method is quite opportunistic in capitalizing on the child's interests.

"Stem's methods, of course, have not been tried on a large scale. With his own children he was able to give them a lot of individualized attention, which would not of course, be possible in a school situation. He is quite realistic about this limitation, but nevertheless believes that his methods can appreciably improve education. I tend to agree with him on this point."

The proposed project offers a contrast to both traditional educational methods and to other current innovative approaches. The ills of traditional practices have been berated frequently and only brief mention will be made of them here. As is well known, our schools—both in Florida and across the nation—are failing to meet the needs of society: in far too many schools, the curriculum is irrelevant to life, the pedagogical approaches are from another era, and the teachers themselves are poorly trained and often inept.

Educational leaders, of course, agree that change is needed in our schools; they disagree, however, on what change should be. Approaches include individualized instruction, modular learning units, behavioral objectives, increased use of technological devices, contingency management, programmed learning materials, staff differentiation, and reorganization of subject matter.

The main thrust of the new educational approaches tends to center on individualized instruction and behavioral objectives. Individualized instruction is also at the center of the project proposed in this document, but behavioral objectives tend to be the antithesis of the total educational submersion approach. While behavioral objectives can be beneficial for some purposes, they are artificial and can be detrimental to the educational process. The proposed project is in no way a reaction to behavioral objectives, per se, but behavioral objectives clearly focus on a highly structured approach as contrasted with the pragmatism and spontaneity of this project. Instead of leading children through pre-set sequences of objectives, total educational submersion will take the interests of the children and will build the instruction around those interests. Where the former approach is somewhat rigid and sterile (even though it is in the name of individualized instruction), the latter is flexible and natural. It makes the educational process relevant to both

the students and the world, capitalizing on the daily interplay between the child and his environment. Much of the problem of motivation can disappear in this approach, for what the child is interested in is also what he is learning about.

Total educational submersion, as the name implies, makes education synonymous with life. It utilizes community resources, topical issues, and everyday events. Thus it is extremely relevant and meaningful to the students.

The proposed project has as its overall objectives the following:

To make school more relevant and meaningful; to develop a well informed person capable of functioning in our dynamic society; to stimulate intellectual growth, creativity, development of innate talents; to motivate to the fullest potential children to become enlightened, alert, responsible citizens dedicated to ideals of social justice; to strengthen the moral fabric; to prepare the academic minded for further studies; and to improve vocational training while restoring its dignity.

## PROCEDURES

The salient points of the proposed total educational submersion project are detailed below.

### *General Methodology*

#### *(1) Optimum Use of Existing Community Resources.*

Boredom and stagnation caused by the isolation of classroom experiences often deter students in their progress. Every community possesses a rich reservoir of facilities, ranging from hospitals, laboratories, courts, factories, etc. where learning becomes a living experience, stimulating the urge for discovery. Vocational facilities will overcome the stigma associated with vocational training. Accessibility to the prime sources of learning in the native setting practiced by experts in their respective fields, will enhance the quality, inspire enthusiasm toward learning and bridge the gap between school and the world at large, between theory and practice.

#### *(2) Community Involvement.*

Racial polarization, generation gap, indifference, and "virtue of non involvement" (*noli me tangere*) pose perhaps the greatest threats to the survival of our society. The great social drama—struggle for social justice, conquest and eradi-

cation of hunger, disease and prejudice—must be a vital part of the curriculum. Students' active participation through educational processes as well as identification with community life lead to development of civic pride which is imperative to growth.

(3) *Teaching Technique Based on Dialogue.*

Perhaps one of the greatest shortcomings of the school system has been its catastrophic reliance on the monologue-lecture. This unilateral process prevents the student from debating an issue and arriving at an intelligent conclusion. Furthermore, lack of qualified teachers and well written books diminishes the quality of learning. Students' reliance on textbooks, class-notes, and a rigid bureaucratic school routine prevents their independent, creative research.

Under the proposed project, learning will be regarded as a bilateral, spontaneous process. Dialogue, debate, discussion, from the earliest age will enhance judicious judgment, development of personality, poise, maturity, and linguistic facility.

Less reliance on textbooks and the absence of lecture notes will encourage independent library research.

(4) *Grades Abolished.*

A wholesome class atmosphere provides a sufficient incentive for learning—*arts gratia artis*. Informality and the ability of the teacher to relate constitute the greatest asset. Some students cope more successfully with tests, irrespective of their knowledge, than others, it is impossible to evaluate progress accurately with them. This makes the use of tests contraproductive.

(5) *Broad Use of Television.*

Television can be an important adjunct to school if it is properly employed. Recent surveys revealed that high school students spend four to six hours daily watching television. The more time they devote to it the less successful they are in school. For the purpose of the study, the programs watched were non-educational such as quiz shows, Westerns, comedies, soap operas, etc.

In the proposed school, instructors would use the educational tools, radio or television; such as documentary films, news broadcasts, and the educational channels.

(6) *Growth of Students at Own Pace.*

Rigid conformity to chronological barriers is at best capri-

cious, arbitrary, and at times harmful. Each child should be encouraged to grow mentally at his own pace.

(7) *School Activities to Last Ten Hours, Six Days a Week.*

In order to secure a wholesome atmosphere, conducive to learning and growth, the joy of discovery would replace the boredom of a compulsory class attendance. Daily trips by buses manned by highly motivated instructors, would provide a productive synthesis of recreation and in-depth learning. This coupled with a lack of home assignments would be welcomed by parents as well as students. Daily field trips are basic to the successful implementation of the method.

### CURRICULUM

(1) *Area Studies In Place of Subject Studies.*

Area studies aimed at breaking down artificial barriers and duplication make the learning process more effective, meaningful and enjoyable. A capable, ingenuous teacher with a wide background of reading can convey to the students with much greater effect such historical facts as Napoleon's defeat in Russia by having them read that description in a good translation of Tolstoi's *War and Peace*. The industrial revolution in England as made real and vivid in several of Dicken's novels or the condition of Italian city-states by a dramatic presentation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as well as getting the benefit of the rich and beautiful English language. With a similar intelligence and knowledge, ingenuity the teacher can provocatively lead the students from physics to chemistry, biology to anatomy, and so on.

(2) *Greater Student Freedom in Decision Making.*

Compulsion stunts a child's mental growth. Rigid curricula choke off students' spontaneous enthusiasm for learning. Compulsory studies not related to the student's preferred and chosen field bring out his resentment or inability to understand and thus interferes with his intellectual progress. Students should have a greater choice in selecting their areas of study.

The maturity of students is being underestimated. A strong responsible student government at all levels of education represents a first experience in democracy. Peer approval or disapproval is an essential factor in progress and the maintenance of harmonious relationships in class; it helps the

teacher to relate better to the students and enhances *esprit de corps*.

(3) *Heavy Emphasis on Current Events.*

In this fast moving world with events continually shaping our destiny and with rapid transportation shrinking the world dramatically, the study of current events is essential. No less than 1½ hour per day should be devoted to it in conjunction with the area study. Students should read the *New York Times* daily from the age of about 11 to grasp the full awareness of the great dramas (e.g., student dissent, international crises) paramount to the formulation of ideas, judgments and identification.

(4) *Heavy Emphasis on Ecology.*

Pollution of every conceivable kind threatens the very survival of the world's population. The study of ecology can inspire dedication to fight this threat on a personal level. Additionally, ecology provides an excellent educational tool for study of science and humanities, in its broadest spectrum. Full awareness and active involvement in the battle must require highest priority. Daily field trips are imperative.

(5) *Foreign Language Study at the Age of Four.*

The pre-school formative period presents an ideal opportunity for study of a second language. Children born in Switzerland are bi-lingual. In many cases fluency in three languages was common among three and four year old Jewish children in Poland (Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish). The population composition of South Florida makes bilingualism desirable and easily attainable (Spanish).

(6) *Sex Education at the Age of Four.*

Frank and accurate treatment of sex education is essential to normal growth, prevents frustration, fears, vulgarity, and misinformation. Parental inability to explain coupled with reluctance to face the problem pose difficulty to a youngster in the early age of discovery.

(7) *Home Economics Revised.*

Home economics as currently taught in our public schools must be drastically revised. They should be not compulsory, but elective courses, because training at home in these matters is sometimes good and sometimes non-existent. Exorbitant funds for expensive kitchen and laundry equipment would better be spent on books. Practical home economics courses, if offered, should be taught with the simplest and most basic

tools, to prepare students, both boys and girls, for emergencies. Emphasis should be placed on health, first aid, nutrition and the economics of consumption.

(8) *Physical Education.*

The hero worship and exaggerated partisanship associated with inter-scholastic, competitive athletics negate educational objectives. Physical education should stress mass participation, and calisthenics to develop the body in harmony with mental growth. The goal is "a healthy mind in a healthy body."

## ENROLLMENT AND REGULATIONS

(1) *Student Enrollment from the Age of Three.*

The process of education under ideal conditions should commence at birth and cease only at death. Psychological studies strengthen my thesis that the learning capacity of pre-school children is enormous. While learning should begin as early as possible, at the age of three children display insatiable intellectual curiosity and readiness to learn, and they are old enough to be taken care of easily at school.

(2) *A Minimum of Conformity and Regulation.*

A productive, uninhibited, learning climate can best be secured through informality, free expression, and spontaneity. The learning process can only be joyful, meaningful and productive when associated with total freedom. Initiative should not be curbed by stagnant regimentation and conformity. Let all the flowers blossom. A teacher should be a friend and confident to guide, inspire, challenge, and provoke the priceless gift of restless inquiry. There should be as complete physical mobility within the school compound as there should be mental mobility in a freedom to disagree with the teacher without fear of reprisals. At times, within limits, an outlet for suppressed hostility should be permitted. Full development of personality, the widening of cultural horizons, the ability to function effectively in interdependence with society must be fostered in complete freedom, as to dress and hair style.

(3) *The Student Body.*

Size should be limited to 150 to 200 students; heterogeneous group with members of ethnic minorities essential, as part of the environmental factors.

Parental consent through a public relations educational campaign will be secured.

## INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

(1) *Instructional Staff, Graduates of Liberal Arts or Science Colleges Only.*

The teachers signify a major factor in the failure of our public school system. Unfortunately college curriculum is frequently totally irrelevant to the profession. The requirements are extremely low. Graduates often enter the teaching profession because they are unable to meet requirements of the other departments of college. Often enrollment represents a desire to evade the draft. Many teachers are poorly prepared, unable to inspire the student and lack the in-depth knowledge in the specific field. The gifted teacher is often unable to be innovative as any departure from the usual is frowned upon. Teachers in my project should be young, dedicated, well educated, willing to share and to learn from the students. They should be totally unrestricted in decorum, capable of utilizing every opportunity for teaching through unorthodox, pragmatic means. They should maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect based on a symbiosis with the student. They will be given twelve weeks of intensive training in the total education submersion method.

(2) *Personnel Involved in Project.*

- 1 Coordinator.
- 8 Highly motivated instructors to be trained by Stern.
- 1 Secretary.
- 2 Bus drivers—Instructors.

## EVALUATION

Nova University has agreed to evaluate the proposed project, thoroughly and objectively. An evaluation team comprised of two behavioral scientists and several Ph.D. candidates in behavioral sciences will conduct the evaluation. Dr. John M. Flynn, Associate Professor at Nova, will lead the team.

Nova University has won acclaim in spite of its short existence as an outstanding institution of higher learning. Its contribution in behavioral sciences and commitment to behavioral research qualifies it uniquely. Nova's computer facilities and competence in statistics will enhance the validity of the scientific evaluation.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### *Lecture Circuit*

The numerous lectures which I deliver, mainly on campuses, afford me great joy and fulfillment. Indeed, I am deeply inspired by our young people who, in their nearly evangelical zeal to purify our society, sharply reject the perfidy and hypocrisy of their elders.

At the root of the "student unrest" which sweeps like a mighty tide the nation's campuses is the impatient resolve to eradicate the blatant inequities prevailing in our nation as well as in the world at large.

The main thrust is directed against the evils of war, social injustice, and the systematic destruction of our ecology.

Last but not least, one can observe the bitter frustration caused by an anachronistic educational system which obviously fails to prepare the young to cope with the complexities and challenges of our dynamic society.

It is against this background that my lectures, mainly devoted to the Total Educational Submersion Method, meet sharp criticism on the part of the school administration, while they generate a good measure of enthusiasm among the students and young faculty.

To illustrate my observations I have selected a few poignant episodes.

At the completion of one lecture, the discussion which followed soon switched from education to Vietnam and to its alienation of the college students. A young man stood up and said, "Just to illustrate the hypocrisy in which we so comfortably

indulge, each time an issue of morality is raised, invariably the public is more concerned about sex than violence. Isn't the pursuit of a needless war with its attendant cruelties more immoral than any sex act? We have grown accustomed to viewing nonchalantly on television acts of incredible barbarism perpetrated against prisoners of war while they are being interrogated and villages being burned to the ground. We don't make as much as a murmur of protest. On the other hand, when a report appears dealing with student premarital sex life, a tide of indignation sweeps the nation. Where are our moral values?"

Another student offered a rebuttal. "On television we see only acts of cruelty committed by our side. No publicity is given to the enemy's bestial terrorism."

The first student replied, "I don't dispute your statement. To begin with we don't know what the public reaction in North Vietnam would be had they viewed the brutality of their armed forces, but this is irrelevant to this discussion.

"I am concerned with the moral values of this country, founded on the Judeo-Christian concepts of justice and mercy. I am concerned with the indifference which has resulted from years of conditioning to atrocities and human misery. I am concerned with the total disintegration of our moral values."

During a visit to another university, I met an elderly Jewish instructor from Poland. He made a commentary on our moral values which was far more poignant because of his experiences. As we discussed our tragic experiences during the Nazi occupation, he said, "You know, Aaron, I must confess a sin. After liberation from the concentration camp, I passionately hated every single German for the Nazi atrocities. The assurances which many offered in their defense, that they personally had nothing to do with it, did not convince me at all. My question, 'What have you done to oppose it?' would be met with silence, or a vague, 'What could one do about it?'

"Now that our country is engaged in a bloody war in defense of a corrupted clique, a war which drains our financial, moral and human resources, causing destruction and indescribable horrors to South Vietnam which we claim to defend, what do I do as an individual? Nothing at all. As you see, I function normally, teaching, reading, and traveling. How will I ever face God? How will I ever atone for this sin?"

The concern was not limited to issues surrounding Vietnam. At

a large, well-equipped college, I decided to devote a substantial part of my lecture to the major cause of the increasing welfare rolls, namely the failure of education to impart employable vocational skills to students who are either unwilling or incapable of continuing their academic work. My thesis was well accepted by the audience. One young man suggested that part of the welfare problem was due to the attitude of the welfare recipients who have abandoned self-reliance and self-sufficiency in favor of a public handout.

In response, a black girl said, "True, it is regrettable that some of our citizens lack the dignity and decency to be self-supporting when they could be. However, the vast majority of the welfare recipients have no choice, due to poor health or lack of skills as Mr. Stern suggested but to turn to welfare. On the other hand, I wonder how many of you realize that welfare in one form or another is being generously extended by the government to many other groups without protest from the public. For example, it is being given to farmers in the form of subsidies to prevent them from cultivating their lands at a time when farm produce is so expensive and some of our children suffer from malnutrition. It is being extended to advertisers in the form of cheap postal bulk rates and the advertisers then flood our mail boxes with junk mail while the post office operates at a deficit. It is being given to the oil industry in the form of oil depletion allowances, the defense industry, the shipbuilding industry, tax depreciation allowances to business, tax free income to holders of municipal bonds, and so on. So you see the unfortunate welfare recipients are not the only ones who receive governmental subsidies."

A young man had previously raised the law and order issue, and in rebuttal, the black girl continued, "Does the outcry for law and order apply only to the frustrated unemployed black boy caught in petty thievery, or does it apply equally to Bobby Baker, Billy Sol Estes, and corrupted government officials who amass millions of dollars by swindles, who deceive and bribe with impunity or at worst, with a token penalty? Who can say whether the violence of a rioter is more harmful to society than the denial of food stamps to an undernourished baby? Should the funds allocated to the poorly managed welfare projects be a greater cause for indignation than the quarter of a billion dollars of public funds spent to rescue Lockheed from its bankruptcy? Is not the incredible waste of life and resources in Vietnam more harmful to the nation's moral health and financial stability than are the funds given to welfare recipients?"

At most of my lectures, I dealt directly with the issues and problems of education. On one campus I antagonized a small but vocal segment of my audience by criticizing universities for emphasizing athletics, often to the detriment of academic pursuits. After the lecture, a middle-aged faculty member related to me the following experience.

"I had been on the faculty of a prestigious university where I taught classical civilization. Because of my linguistic skills and a broad scholastic background acquired at leading American and European universities, I was regarded as one of the best men in my department. Since my course was required for students seeking a Bachelor's degree, I always had a large enrollment in my classes. My greatest problem in teaching was the athletes who in general did not excel in scholarship. Since I was aware of the significance which the school attached to athletics, I was rather lenient with the players and expected a bare minimum of accomplishment from them.

"Then one semester, Joe, the star football player, was in my class. At our first conference, I became convinced that he planned to do nothing in the course. He told me that he always got a passing grade. As the semester progressed, the student failed every test and did not submit his term project, dismissing my warnings with a smile. At the end of the term, I felt that I had no other choice than to give Joe an 'F'.

"After the grades were issued, I was summoned to see the president, whom I had never met alone before. 'So you failed Joe,' the president said. 'Are you aware that as the star football player, he constitutes our most important pillar? Apart from the prestige, the team contributes huge sums of money to the university budget. The failure in your class would require his disqualification from the team. Can you visualize the consequences of such a step?'

"'Fully.'

"'Then please revise his grade.'

"'I'm sorry, but Joe made no effort to meet his responsibilities. He learned nothing, wasting his time as well as mine. I would be derelict in my duties if I acted otherwise.'

"'Is that your irrevocable decision?'

"'I'm afraid it is.'

"'Are you aware that people like yourself are expendable?'

"At that point, I requested a sheet of paper and wrote out my resignation. You know, Mr. Stern, my salary is lower now, but I don't regret my decision."

At another school, a young admissions officer zealously spoke about the crisis in education. He told me that many of the high-school graduates applying for admission to the college were unable to fill out a simple form and that he had to assign a clerk to assist them with their applications. In fact, some of the applicants were unable to read or write properly, let alone comprehend concepts.

At many schools I found students who complained about the educational process. At one lecture, I met a young professor of psychology. After we talked for a while, he remarked, "You make a lot of waves, antagonizing people without accomplishing much. Why don't you follow my example by working from within the establishment to bring about improvement?"

"The establishment simply doesn't want me," I replied.

"Well, I'm quite successful in my work. I enjoy fine rapport with my students and I know them quite well since I create an informal atmosphere."

"How well do you know them?" I inquired.

"Quite well. They seem to be happy with the school. Would you care to talk to my class?"

I delivered a lecture and answered questions. Afterwards I suggested that we reverse the process. I asked, "What was your impression of the high school you attended?" Not one student praised his school. The complaints ranged from mediocre to deplorable with accompanying explanations. Then I inquired whether the students were pleased with the college they were presently attending.

Nearly every student raised his hand. The comments included "Mediocre" and "An extension of the high school waste." Some students admitted that they smoked marijuana out of boredom. Others stated that their presence at the college was exclusively motivated by draft evasion.

"You know, Aaron, you have elicited some information which amazed me," the professor told me later.

"Well, students are usually frank with people outside the establishment," I replied sardonically.

At one high school the principal asked me, "How does one teach children who are unwilling to learn? They are incorrigible."

"Why is that?"

"Well, there is a group of youngsters in our school whose ages range from thirteen to seventeen. They are about to drop out, yet no one can reach or motivate them. Probably some experiment with drugs. We are quite sure that a few smoke marijuana."

I asked if I could meet with some of the students, and within an hour a room was set aside into which twelve or fifteen teenagers, mostly black, came in. I decided to interview them separately and privately. I asked the first boy, "Why don't you study? How will you be able to earn a living without a high school diploma?"

"I ain't got much to do here. It's so stupid, so boring."

"You have a fine school and dedicated teachers. Surely there must be something of interest to you."

"Not much really."

"What are you interested in?"

"I like cars. I would like to take them apart and put them together again to see how they work. But I can't do that here."

Another boy was equally critical about the school. "It really has no meaning. This is not going to help me in the future."

"For crying out loud, you must be interested in something." I said. "Your Dad will not support you forever."

"I have always wanted to be a pilot. I love the wide open spaces, the clean air."

"Indeed, you must finish high school and then study aviation."

"I don't think I'll make it. I have only failing grades. I feel I'd better leave school before they kick me out."

"They will not expel you, but you must show some desire to learn," I warned him.

"I really don't care anymore."

Mary was equally disappointed. "There is no sense in wasting my time any further. I will get married and have children."

"That is fine. Suppose your husband will need you to supplement his income."

"Well, I'm good at drawing."

All of the youngsters I interviewed impressed me as bright,

but woefully lacking in both guidance and motivation. Later I admonished the principal, "Here is a boy interested in learning about an automobile. What a splendid educational opportunity this is. It includes combustion engineering, kinetic energy, electricity, and a wealth of information which you can impart without sweat or tears. Likewise the boy interested in flying would be eager to learn all he can about navigation, electricity, and aviation instruments."

"Unfortunately, we are not equipped to do that. Furthermore, we must comply with our curriculum requirements."

"Even at the cost of losing these youngsters?"

"Cruel as it may sound, we have no alternative," he replied.

All of the problems which I observed in the schools were not limited to the teaching and the curriculum. In some cases the schools have ruined students' lives by other means. For example, I heard about Mary, an attractive seventeen-year-old girl, who, as have many other teenagers, experimented with sex. Unfortunately, she became pregnant. Unable to obtain solace from her parents who were devout Catholics, she could find very little sympathy from her sexual partner, from the other students, and least of all from the school authorities. Such are the facts of life. Many girls play the game, but the one who gets caught must suffer. Of course, the boy remains unpunished.

The school, unable to cope with the situation, was determined to expel her, since it regarded her presence as demoralizing. A faculty meeting was called to consider the problem. I, an outsider, was also present.

"In compliance with school regulations Mary will have to be expelled. We have no other choice," the principal announced.

Whereupon I asked, "Is it true that other high school students indulge in sex?"

"Undoubtedly, some of them do," was the reply.

"Is it true that none of them have ever been punished for their promiscuous activities?"

"We have no knowledge of their sex activities. None have gotten pregnant before."

"How about the boy who fathered the child?"

"We don't even know who he is. Had we known we could not take any punitive steps against him."

"Which means that he will go scot free?"

"Yes, it appears so."

"Well, how can you indulge so cruelly in double standards of justice? Here is a young lady who unwisely experimented with sex just as her classmates have, but they did it with total impunity. Because of pregnancy she now faces a traumatic experience which may never be forgotten. She faces hostile parents, an indifferent society that is not likely to soon forgive her sins, and ridicule on the part of the other students. She will have to give birth to an unwanted baby without the funds to support it. In addition to all this, you will expel her from school, thus will deny her a high school diploma which she will badly need to secure a job or enter college at some future time. Has she not been punished enough? Please permit her to remain for the balance of the term and graduate. I understand her scholastic abilities are excellent." Tears prevented me from completing my statement.

A dead silence greeted these remarks. The poor girl was expelled. An editorial appeared in the paper the next day under heading "Radical Professor Advocates Sexual Promiscuity."

At many lectures, people asked how I maintained the rapport with my children. At one college, a professor said, "Mr. Stern, I have read so many accounts of Edith's accomplishments. How did you motivate her?"

"Plain educational opportunism seizing every conceivable occasion for learning. There is nothing mystic about it. Motivate and challenge the child constantly whether it is play, rest, or recreation. And above all, don't lecture. Learning must be a dual process of discovery. A kind of an eternal dialogue."

"Well, you see I have this problem; I try to teach my students the fundamentals of government and history, but they insist upon discussions of "Soul On Ice," student alienation, Vietnam, legalization of marijuana, etc. Mine was an entirely different experience at Duke University."

"Perhaps those were other times and the composition of the student body was entirely different."

"As I understand it there is just one way of learning. You cannot intelligently appraise the Negro struggle for advancement

without familiarity with the Civil War, any more than you are able to bring about a legislative action without learning the governmental structure," he indignantly replied.

"I don't dispute it at all, but the important fact that you seem to overlook is that you have young people eager to learn. Most likely the current burning issues are by far more relevant to them. Thus, you have an option either to seize this opportunity for a meaningful course of study or lose the rapport with the students altogether. It is as simple as that."

"I really fail to understand you," he pursued.

"All these topics represent contemporary history. Why not reverse the chronological order and start from the current events? Why not create meaningful parallels such as the landmark Supreme Court decision versus Lincoln's proclamation, the disastrous effects of the Vietnam War and the infamy of the French in Vietnam? Why not explore the historical balances of the branches of government and the sharp divisions of the Congress and Executive Branch over the conduct of the Vietnam War? The paroxysms of the Catholic Church in parallel with the pre-reformation period. Or why don't you explore student unrest as a world-wide phenomenon?"

"You make it appear so simple. How did you really motivate her?"

"My dear professor, I just outlined to you in detail my methodology."

At a junior college appearance which attracted a huge crowd, a professor of education inadvertently required his education classes to attend my lecture. Many of his colleagues as well as faculty members of other departments were present.

This happened subsequent to the submitting of my proposals for the demonstration school to the State Department of Education. I read the document to the audience. It was warmly received by both the students and faculty. When the question and answer period followed, the students endorsed one by one my proposals. A petition addressed to the State Department of Education requesting its implementation was signed by the vast majority of the audience.

Then one young teacher rose to criticize my methods which in his judgment "would destroy our educational system." The students and I rebutted his remarks.

Finally he rose again to say, "Your proposals are contrary to the American tradition, since they are similar to the Soviet Union school system."

"You are dead wrong, sir. It is the Soviet system which adheres to a strict regimentation in accord with a dogma. A child there is destined from his infancy to follow a course of studies consistent with the needs of the state, irrespective of his desires. In the Soviet Union a strict discipline governs the school life. Innovation and experimentation are not tolerated. On the other hand, my proposals suggest a school where children, unhampered by any restrictions, are free to develop their personality and their creativity. They are free to argue with their teacher without inhibitions or repercussions and to grow at their own pace without regard for chronological age. Isn't this in sharp contrast with our public school system as well as the Soviet system? Obviously both fail to meet the challenges of their respective societies."

A burst of applause drowned my words. A young, black student then approached me. "Well, Mr. Stern, you must realize that people fear change. They will resort to any form of innuendo in an effort to preserve their status. The same applies to school integration, as well as the medical association's opposition to the national health care program." He then asked to be considered for a teaching position when such a school is established.

"I think your chances are remote. I doubt that the State Department of Education will approve my proposals." Unfortunately I was right.

In my deep concern over the destiny of our country I am reassured and deeply inspired by America's youth which represents a new hope. Our young people, those wearing long hair and those wearing short, have discarded fancy clothing and shiny cars, to embrace the simple joy of life, are leading the way to a just tomorrow.

White youths, rejecting the prejudices of their fathers who stood by Wallace in denying university admission to a black man, now walk hand in hand with their black brothers. Blacks have been elected as student body presidents in many formerly all white universities not because of their color, but because they possess qualities of leadership. Thousands of white youths have braved poverty and the threat of physical danger traveling through the South to secure the right of voting for Blacks.

Our children have acquired a love of peace, a sensitivity of character, and a burning desire to obliterate the inequities which they have inherited. I am greatly moved by the young people who have turned their backs on wealth to serve in the Peace Corps and in Vista. I applaud the thousands who have devotedly campaigned for peace candidates.

I can well understand the young men who have chosen to sacrifice their freedom or who have accepted exile rather than mutilate innocent people in a needless war. I admire the Vietnam veterans, who having fought bravely, then had the courage to admit the futility of their sacrifices in a passionate plea for peace. I esteem the young people who oppose the war because it is immoral, rather than uneconomical.

I see the young generation as virtuous, and motivated by idealistic goals unlike any previous one. Our young have rejected chauvinism, dogmatism, and conformity. They have a simplicity of speech which excludes clichés and platitudes. Medical students have chosen the altruistic goals of healing the sick rather than to amass great wealth. Law students provide dedicated service, helping the indigent, protecting the consumer, and maintaining ideals of justice instead of seeking lucrative corporate law practices.

Young girls, rather than seeking the financial comfort of marriage, are determined to attain skills in order to contribute as equal members to society. Young blacks, rather than be merely embittered by the inequities of society, pour by the thousands into universities to learn and uplift their people.

I love you, young America, all of you who have denounced the terror of extremism, the euphoria of drugs, the nihilism of pageantry, the worship of beauty contests, the empty rituals of fraternities, in order to pursue introspection and study.

I also love the hard-working young people who, not having gone to college, provide the goods and services upon which our nation depends. Indeed, you maintain the dignity of labor.

It is my unswerving hope that the vote which the eighteen-year-olds have now gained will lead to young, vigorous, and honest leadership, not only for the sake of America, but of the world at large. Through such leadership, we can hopefully divert our enormous resources from a cruel war to a betterment of life by providing high quality education and by solving the problems

of dying cities, a stranded ecology, hunger, poverty, and unemployment.

Let us remember that the only way to overcome despair and bigotry is through education.

I love you young people, the best generation America has ever had. You are our tower of hope.

### **About the Author**

Aaron Stern authored "Ethnic Minorities in Poland" 1937 and a study of "Nazi Atrocities in Europe" as well as many articles.

He attended Warsaw University, Brooklyn College, Jewish Theological Seminary and Graduate Div. of Columbia University.

Fluent in 10 languages Aaron Stern lectured on his "method" at many universities here and abroad.

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